HISTORICAL (IN)ACCURACY AND LINGUISTIC ARCHAISM IN DANIEL 5 *

INTRODUCTION

The fifth chapter of the book of Daniel contains the famous story of the writing on the wall. Nebuchadnezzar's son Belshazzar, the last king of Babylon, sins by using the vessels from the Jerusalem Temple at his feast and by blessing all the idols, but not the true God. A supernatural hand writes an illegible message on the wall (according to the Masoretic Text [MT]: מנא מנא תקל ופרסין), which the Judahite exile Daniel reads and interprets as predicting the fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire to the Medes and Persians. Despite the gloomy forecast, Daniel receives his promised reward of luxurious clothing and a high position, and the prediction is fulfilled that very night.

While this story is clearly legendary, scholars have also identified some concrete historical inaccuracies [1]. Two important ones focus on the character of King Belshazzar, son of Nebuchadnezzar. Historically, Belshazzar (Akkadian: Bēl-šarra-uṣur) was not the son or descendant of Nebuchadnezzar (Nabû-kudurrī-uṣur), but of Nabonidus (Nabû-nāʾid). Nor was he ever king, although he did reign as vice-regent in his father's absence from the city [2]. Given this entrustment of the kingship (šarrūtu) to Belshazzar, as recorded in the *Verse Account of Nabonidus* [3], the use of the Aramaic word מלך (commonly: "king") may not be completely inappropriate [4]. But the fact remains that Nebuchadnezzar was not historically Belshazzar's father or ancestor, making the use of the words בר "son, descendant" and אב "father, ancestor" inaccurate. An author writing soon after Belshazzar's time would be unlikely to make such a mistake. Hence, the

[1] C.A. NEWSOM, *Daniel. A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, KY 2014) 163-164.

[2] J.J. COLLINS, *Daniel. A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN 1993) 32-33.

[3] COLLINS, *Daniel*, 32.

[4] P.R. DAVIES, *Daniel* (OTG 4; Sheffield 1993) 30-31. The comparison is often made to the use of מלך in the Tell Fekheriye inscription (KAI 309) for a person who is referred to as a governor in the matching Akkadian version.

presence of Nebuchadnezzar in this story has been taken as evidence for its composition some considerable time after its setting in the sixth century BCE [5].

In this article, we will consider whether this evidence for a relatively late dating also holds for Daniel 5*, the hypothetically reconstructible earliest version of this text. Nebuchadnezzar is explicitly mentioned or implicitly referred to in three contexts in the chapter. Based on comparison to the different edition of Daniel 5 preserved in the Old Greek translation (OG) and on internal, literary evidence, I will argue that all of these mentions are secondary to the text [6]. Additionally, a number of remarkably archaic linguistic features occur in one passage of Daniel 5 in particular. Taken together, this text-critical, literary, and linguistic evidence suggests that the story of the writing on the wall not only preserves traditions from the Neo-Babylonian period but may have been written down soon afterwards.

I. MENTIONS OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR IN DANIEL 5

Nebuchadnezzar features prominently in the first one-third of Daniel as the arrogant and often-incensed king of Babylon, sometimes with reference to his role in the destruction of Jerusalem (Dan 1,1-2; see also

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[5] COLLINS, *Daniel*, 33.

[6] OG Daniel is only directly attested in two manuscripts: the pre-Hexaplaric Papyrus 967, dated to the third century CE, and in the Hexaplaric, tenth-century Codex Chisianus, referred to as '88'. It can also be reconstructed based on the close Syriac translation of the Syro-Hexapla. These sources form the basis of the critical edition employed for this article: O. MUNNICH (ed.), *Susanna. Daniel. Bel et Draco* (Septuaginta 16; Göttingen [2a]1999). The appropriateness of treating MT and OG of Daniel 5 as different versions of the same text has recently been questioned by I. YOUNG, "The Original Problem. The Old Greek and the Masoretic Text of Daniel 5", *Empirical Models Challenging Biblical Criticism* (eds. R.F. PERSON JR. – R. REZETKO) (Ancient Israel and Its Literature 25; Atlanta, GA 2016) 271-301. Based on the many differences between these texts, Young argues that they do not reflect a single written archetype, but are different textualizations of related oral traditions. Contrast the approach that does assume a textual relationship, adopted, for instance, by E. ULRICH, "The Parallel Editions of the Old Greek and Masoretic Text of Daniel 5", *A Teacher for All Generations*. Essays in Honor of James C. VanderKam (ed. E.F. MASON) (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 153; Leiden – Boston, MA 2012) 201-217; M. SEGAL, "Daniel 5 in Aramaic and Greek and the Textual History of Daniel 4–6", *Congress Volume Stellenbosch 2016* (eds. L.C. JONKER – G.R. KOTZÉ – C.M. MAIER) (Leiden 2017) 251-284. Following especially Segal, I too believe that the differences between MT and OG are surmountable; many examples of variation between MT and OG highlighted by Young are similar to cases documented in manuscript transmission of what is unquestionably the same text. The presence in both texts of many shared expressions, which are often immaterial to the plot, strongly points towards transmission in a more or less fixed textual form.

the secondary mention of this fact in OG Dan 4,19) [7]. Within Daniel 5, he is identified as Belshazzar's father by the character David in his recapitulation of the events of Daniel 4, by the queen, and by Belshazzar himself, as well as in the mentions of the Temple vessels which he brought from Jerusalem.

1. *Daniel's recapitulation (5,18-22)*

When Daniel is called in to read the writing, both MT and OG have him begin by chastising Belshazzar for his sins. The MT's version of this speech includes a summary of earlier events affecting Nebuchadnezzar, which Belshazzar should have taken to heart:

> You, O king — the Highest God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar the kingdom and greatness and glory and splendor. And due to the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and tongues trembled before him and feared him. He would kill whomever he wished and he would keep whomever he wished alive and he would exalt whomever he wished and he would humble whomever he wished. But when his mind grew exalted and his spirit grew exceedingly arrogant, he was brought down from his royal throne and the glory was removed from him. And he was driven away from human beings and his mind was made equal to that of animals, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. They fed him grass like cattle and his body was washed by the dew of heaven, until he learned that the Highest God reigns over the kingdom of mankind and he can establish whomever he wants over it. But you, his son Belshazzar, did not humble your mind, even though you know all this [8]. (MT Dan 5,18-22)

This passage establishes continuity with the preceding chapter and holds up Nebuchadnezzar, who had to learn about God's power the hard way, as an example to his son Belshazzar. In OG, however, this passage is completely absent. As most recently argued by Michael Segal [9], there is no apparent reason why OG should have eliminated it, while the reasons for its insertion in MT are clear; it is most likely a secondary addition.

2. *"your/my father the king" (5,11.13)*

Two more mentions of Nebuchadnezzar occur in MT in 5,11 and 5,13. The first one is shared in other words with OG (where it occurs in v. 12).

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[7] On the mention in Daniel 4, see M. SEGAL, *Dreams, Riddles, and Visions*. Textual, Contextual, and Intertextual Approaches to the Book of Daniel (BZAW 455; Berlin 2016) 117-118.

[8] All translations of the MT are mine.

[9] SEGAL, "Daniel 5", 255-256.

The second does not occur there explicitly, although reference is made to the Judahite exile in OG v. 10, possibly implicitly alluding to Nebuchadnezzar's role in that event. Below the quotes from the MT, I have included a translation of OG 5,10-12 for comparison.

> There is a man in your kingdom in whom there is a spirit of holy gods, and in the days of your father, illumination and understanding and wisdom like wisdom of the gods was found in him. And your father King Nebuchadnezzar, your father the king established him as the chief of [various kinds of mantic experts]. (MT Dan 5,11)

> The king spoke, saying to Daniel: "You must be Daniel, who is of the exiles of Judah, whom my father the king exiled from Judah". (MT Dan 5,13b)

> Then the queen reminded him concerning Daniel who was among the captives of Judea. And she said to the king, "That person was prudent and wise and surpassed all the sages of Babylon, and a holy spirit is in him. And in the days of your father the king he explained difficult meanings to Nabouchodonosor your father [10]". (OG Dan 5,10-12)

In MT v. 11, the subject is mentioned twice: once at the beginning of the sentence, as מלכא נבכדנצר אבוך "your father King Nebuchadnezzar", and once at the end, as אבוך מלכא "your father the king". It is likely that of these two subjects, the more specific one was added later, presumably to more explicitly identify Belshazzar's father as Nebuchadnezzar.

Nebuchadnezzar is not explicitly named in MT v. 13, but he is implicitly referred to, as he was the Babylonian king responsible for the Judahite exile. The repetition here is less jarring than that in v. 11. Still, "whom my father the king exiled from Judah" reads as an afterthought and serves no purpose in the context other than once again asserting that Belshazzar is the son of Nebuchadnezzar. Moreover, we are most likely dealing with an interpolation here as well. As the whole passage of MT vv. 13b-16a has no direct OG parallel, it is tentatively identified as secondary by Segal on other grounds [11].

3. *The desecration of the Temple vessels (5,2-3.23)*

This leaves us with the first and last mentions of Nebuchadnezzar, in connection with the vessels from the Jerusalem Temple. These are shared by both MT and OG. Nebuchadnezzar is explicitly mentioned in 5,2-3, while his involvement is implied by the mention of the Temple vessels in 5,23.

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[10] Translations of OG are from NETS.
[11] SEGAL, "Daniel 5", 256-257.

> Under influence of the wine, Belshazzar ordered that the golden and silver vessels that his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the palace that was in Jerusalem be brought in so that the king and his nobles, his concubines and his consorts could drink from them. Then they brought the golden vessels that they had taken from the palace of the house of God that was in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his concubines and his consorts drank from them. (MT Dan 5,2-3)

> And you exalted yourself against the Lord of Heaven and they brought the vessels of his house before you and you and your nobles, your concubines and your consorts were drinking wine from them, and you praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone, who do not see and do not hear and know nothing, but you did not glorify the god who holds your breath in his hand and whose are all your ways. (MT Dan 5,23)

As Daniel's narration in v. 23 makes clear, Belshazzar has committed two sins. Not only did he abuse the vessels from the Temple, but he also neglected to praise God while praising idols instead (originally narrated in v. 4) [12]. It is remarkable that divine punishment, which is decreed immediately following the second sin (MT v. 5: בה שעתה "at that moment"), appears to be lacking after the first sin is committed. Moreover, the sin of sacrilegious use of the Temple vessels seems more specifically tailored to a Jewish audience than the sin of omission of the one god who should be praised if any are to be praised at all. It seems more likely that a more universally recognizable sin would be supplemented with one with special relevance to the target audience than vice versa. If we agree that the double sin is unnecessarily redundant, then the use of the Temple vessels is more likely to be secondary [13]. Such a later addition would reflect the trend of ascribing increasing importance to the Temple vessels and their preservation as a symbol of continuity with the First Temple Period after the Babylonian Exile [14].

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[12] Cf. L.M. WILLS, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King*. Ancient Jewish Court Legends (HDR 26; Minneapolis, MN 1990) 122-123; NEWSOM, *Daniel*, 162.

[13] The redundancy of the first sin is confirmed by its absence from the short summary of the story included at the beginning of the OG account, known as the Preface or OG Dan 5,0. *Pace* D. AMARA, "The Third Version of the Story of Belshazzar's Banquet (Daniel 5) [Hebrew]", *Textus* 23 (2007), and J.L. PANNKUK, "The Preface to Old Greek Daniel 5: A Formal Approach", *VT* 67 (2017) 213-226, the Preface is probably dependent on the other attested versions of Daniel 5, however, so it does not reflect a stage of the text before this sin was added; cf. SEGAL, "Daniel 5". Pannkuk argues against Segal that ancient scribes would not have misread MT v. 1 as implying the presence of two thousand guests, as stated in the Preface, but cf. the similar, overly literal reading of Zech 9,9: "riding on a donkey, (and) on an ass, the son of she-asses" in Matt 21,2-7, where the poetic repetition of חמור and עיר is reinterpreted as referring to two separate animals.

[14] P.R. ACKROYD, "The Temple Vessels — A Continuity Theme", *Studies in the Religion of Ancient Israel* (VTSup 23; Leiden 1972) 166-181.

There are further indications that the use of the Temple vessels was
added secondarily. Segal identifies the "concubines and consorts", which
are lacking from OG, as a secondary feature of MT [15]. Especially without
this phrase, vv. 3-4 read very repetitively:

> Then they brought the golden vessels that they had taken from the palace
> of the house of God that was in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, ~~his~~
> ~~concubines and his consorts~~ drank from them. They drank wine and praised
> the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. (MT Dan 5,3-4)

The same verb אשתיו "they drank" is used twice in rapid succession
for no apparent reason. This repetition becomes understandable if vv. 2-3
were secondarily inserted. In MT v. 1, the number "one thousand" lacks
a parallel in OG; Segal once again identifies this as an expansion in MT [16].
The rest of v. 1b, "and ~~before the one thousand~~ he was drinking wine",
most likely forms part of the same interpolation as vv. 2-3, as it explains
how Belshazzar came to be intoxicated enough to order the Temple
vessels to be brought to him. Excluding all of these elements leaves us
with a smooth transition from v. 1a to v. 4:

> King Belshazzar prepared a great feast for his nobles […] They drank
> wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.
> (MT Dan 5,1a.4, minus אלף "one thousand")

In v. 23, on the other hand, there is no indication that the mention of the
Temple vessels is secondary compared to its direct context. It is likely,
however, that the entire recapitulation of vv. 23-24 is secondary. In MT,
it is somewhat intrusive, as it stands between Daniel's statement that "I
will read the writing for the king and make known to him the interpre-
tation" (v. 17) and the actual reading and interpretation in vv. 25-28. In
OG, the interruption is even worse, as the writing is already read in v. 17
(assuming that ἠρίθμηται κατελογίσθη ἐξῆρται "it has been numbered;
it has been reckoned; it has been taken away" translates the mysterious
words themselves, מנא תקל פרס) followed by the announcement that "this
is their interpretation", with the interpretation not being given until vv. 26-
28. OG v. 26 once again states that "this is the meaning of the writing",
which looks like a resumptive repetition (*Wiederaufnahme*) of v. 17. MT
has lessened the back-and-forth by moving the reading of the writing
to v. 25, but the more awkward order of OG is probably more original.
This resumptive repetition strongly suggests that vv. 23-24 were second-
arily inserted to spell out what Belshazzar did wrong. Restoring a more

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[15] SEGAL, "Daniel 5", 257-260.
[16] SEGAL, "Daniel 5", 258.

original form of the text where v. 17 was immediately followed by v. 25 (since vv. 18-22 were already argued to be secondary) leaves us with a Belshazzar story that does not mention or allude to Nebuchadnezzar anywhere, removing the main historical argument against its early composition.

II. Archaic Language in Daniel 5

Without the historically inaccurate depiction of Belshazzar as Nebuchadnezzar's son, a major obstacle for the early dating of Daniel 5 is removed. Evidence pointing towards a relatively early date of composition for the core narrative comes from several linguistic features occurring in vv. 10-12, where "the queen" (Aramaic: מלכתא), generally taken to be Belshazzar's mother or even grandmother [17], tells Belshazzar about Daniel and suggests he be called to read the writing on the wall. We will examine three such features.

As is shown especially by the phenomenon of *ketiv–qere* discrepancies, the reading tradition underlying the Masoretic vocalization is secondary as a whole to the Biblical Aramaic consonantal texts. Linguistically, the dialect of the reading tradition finds its closest parallels in Aramaic varieties of the late first century CE [18], some two centuries after the latest texts in Daniel were composed. Since the features we will consider are archaic even within the consonantal text itself, it is no wonder that they were unfamiliar to the people who fixed the reading tradition. In two cases, we will see that the reading reflected by the Masoretic vocalization is probably not the one that was originally intended, while this is also possible, if less probable, in the case of the remaining archaic feature.

1. יתקרי *"let him be called" (5,12)*

The queen's speech concludes with the words "now, let Daniel be called (יִתְקְרֵי) and he will tell the interpretation" (v. 12b). The Masoretic Text vocalizes the verb "let him be called" as an imperfect, reflecting a reconstructed form *yitqarē* [19]. Here, *-ē* is the normal ending for III-weak

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[17] COLLINS, *Daniel*, 248.

[18] B.D. SUCHARD, "The Origins of the Biblical Aramaic Reading Tradition", *VT* 71 (2021) 105-119.

[19] For the reconstruction of the Biblical Aramaic reading tradition used in this section, see B.D. SUCHARD, "Sound Changes in the (Pre-)Masoretic Reading Tradition and

imperfects. But a complication arises when we take Biblical Aramaic consonantal orthography into account. Elsewhere, word-final *-ē is exclusively spelled with ה or א; this holds for verbs, e.g. תֶּהֱוֵא and תֶּהֱוֵה *tihwē "it (f.) will be", as well as adjectives and nouns, e.g. גָּלֵא and גָּלֵה *gālē "revealing (m.sg.)"; כָּרְסֵא *kursē "throne"; אַרְיֵה *ʔaryē "lion". An apparent counterexample occurs in the construct state masculine plural ending, which is spelled with י, but historically this was *-ay, as still in Syriac, not *-ē, e.g. בְּנֵי *banay "sons of". The spelling יתקרי for *yitqarē is thus unexpected, as this would appear to be the only case of *-ē spelled with י in all of the Biblical Aramaic corpus.

III-weak prefix conjugation forms ending in י do regularly occur in Imperial Aramaic. Here, we find a contrast between imperfects spelled with final ה and jussives spelled with final י: a minimal pair occurs in יהוה *yihwē "he will be" vs. יהוי *yihwī "let him be" [20]. Given the context, Dan 5,12's יתקרי must also originally have been intended as a morphologically distinct jussive, *yitqarī "let him be called" [21]. In later Aramaic, this form was lost, and the regular imperfect was used with this meaning, e.g. Dan 2,20 להוא *lihwē "let it (m.) be", Ezra 5,15 יתבנא *yitbanē "let it (m.) be built". Accordingly, the readers vocalized יתקרי as *yitqarē, drawing on later Aramaic spelling practices where word-final -ē could be expressed by י. While negated jussives occur both in this passage (אל יבהלוך "let them not terrify you", אל ישתנו "let them not change", both in v. 10) and elsewhere (אל יבהלך "let it not terrify you", Dan 4,19), this is the only positive, morphologically contrastive jussive attested in Daniel or Ezra (but cf. יאבדו "let them be lost", Jer 10,11) [22]. The verb יהחה at the end of v. 12 is spelled with a final ה, ostensibly contradicting the suggestion that the spelling with final י marks a morphologically distinct jussive [23]. In context, however, this verb may better be interpreted not as another jussive but as an imperfect with final modality: "(Now let Daniel be called) in order to explain (the meaning)". This matches the fact

the Original Pronunciation of Biblical Aramaic", *Studia Orientalia Electronica* 7 (2019) 52-65.

[20] T. MURAOKA – B. PORTEN, *A Grammar of Egyptian Aramaic* (HdO 32; Leiden ²2003) § 37d.

[21] Cf. F. ROSENTHAL, *A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic* (PLO 5; Wiesbaden ⁷2006) §§ 108, 152. S. SEGERT, *Altaramäische Grammatik* (Leipzig 1975) § 5.7.8.4.2, writes that such a jussive is not attested in Biblical Aramaic, implicitly rejecting the possibility that יתקרי should be identified as such.

[22] Cf. ROSENTHAL, *Biblical Aramaic*, § 108.

[23] Jussives with final ה do occasionally occur in the Proverbs of Ahiqar (TADAE C1.1). These are analyzed as inconsistencies by MURAOKA – PORTEN, *Egyptian Aramaic*, 137 n. 693, but they are considered as distinct forms of III-w verbs by I. KOTTSIEPER, *Die Sprache der Aḥiqarsprüche* (BZAW 194; Berlin 1990).

that in our narrative, "let him be called" is a direct order, given to those present, while **"let him explain" is not. Recognizing a morphological distinction between jussive and imperfect in this verse thus enhances our understanding of its meaning.

2. ואמרת *"saying" (5,10)*

A very frequent collocation introducing direct speech in Daniel is ענה ואמר, often with the subject intervening, as in ענה מלכא ואמר "the king spoke, saying […]". The spelling of the masculine singular form of this expression is ambiguous with regards to tense. Despite the past-tense reference, the Masoretic vocalization takes both verbal forms as participles: עָנֵה *ʕānē "answering (m.sg.)" and אָמַר *ʔāmar "saying (m.sg.)". Both forms could also be vocalized as perfects, however: *ʕanā "he answered" and *ʔamar "he said" would have the same consonantal spelling.

Where unambiguously spelled forms occur, the tendency is to use a perfect for the first verb: masculine plural ענו *ʕanaw (Dan 2,7.10; 3,9.16; 6,13) and, in our passage, feminine singular ענת *ʕanāt (Dan 5,10). An unambiguous participle only occurs once as ענין *ʕānayn in Dan 3,24, in an exchange that is absent from OG, adds nothing to the story, and is therefore probably a late interpolation in MT. It is unlikely that the language would use the perfect for this construction in the plural but a participle in the singular. The construction thus originally employed a perfect for the first verb; the ambiguous form ענה represents the perfect *ʕanā, although it entered the reading tradition as a participle *ʕānē, reflecting the same reinterpretation of this construction seen in the interpolated form in Dan 3,24.

For the second verb, on the other hand, the unambiguous forms nearly all point to a participle. In the masculine plural, we find ואמרין *wa-ʔāmarīn in every case (Dan 2,7.10; 3,9.16.24; 6,13). As the translation "saying" suggests, we can understand a participle in this context as expressing a circumstance. The construction is then similar to Classical Arabic ḥāl clauses like (ğāʔa) rākiban "(he came) riding", where ğāʔa is a perfect and rākiban is a participle in the accusative [24]. Only in our passage do we find what appears to be a perfect: ואמרת *wa-ʔamárat.

The same expression ענת ואמרת occurs in the Sheikh Fadl inscription (TADAE D23.1.II:10), dated paleographically to the first half of the fifth century BCE but set in the seventh century and possibly originally

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[24] W. FISCHER, *Grammatik des klassischen Arabisch* (PLO 11; Wiesbaden 1972) § 380.

composed at that time [25]. As in Daniel 5, both verbs appear to be perfects. This is confirmed by multiple unambiguous forms in the Proverbs of Ahiqar (TADAE C1.1), where we find ענית ואמרת "I spoke, saying" (l. 45, with a masculine subject) and ענו [...] ואמרו "they spoke, saying" (l. 169; only ואמרו attested in l. 58). These attestations occur both in the narrative framework, written in Imperial Aramaic, and in the proverbs themselves, which reflect an older dialect characterized by Gzella as "late Old Aramaic" [26]. Comparing these attestations to those in the Biblical Aramaic corpus, there seems to have been a diachronic development of perfect + perfect (Proverbs of Ahiqar, Sheikh Fadl and Dan 5,10) → perfect + participle (Biblical Aramaic consonantal text in most places) → participle + participle (Dan 3,24 and Biblical Aramaic reading tradition, where possible). Dan 5,10 thus patterns with the older, possibly even pre-Imperial Aramaic phase of the language, against the rest of the Biblical Aramaic corpus.

3. מפשר *"interpreting"*, אחוית *"solving"*, משרא *"untying"* (5,12)

The queen's praise of Daniel in v. 12 includes three phrases consisting of a bare infinitive, i.e. one that is not preceded by ל "to" or another preposition, and its complement:

> Since an exceptional spirit and knowledge and understanding, interpreting (מפשר) dreams and solving (אחוית) riddles and untying (משרא) knots was present in this Daniel [...] (MT Dan 5,12aα)

The use of an infinitive without a preposition is exceptional in Biblical Aramaic and does not occur elsewhere [27]. When this statement of the queen is repeated by Belshazzar in v. 16, which may be from a later hand as mentioned above, it is paraphrased to avoid the construction with the bare infinitive:

> And I have heard about you that you are able to provide (למפשר) interpretations and to untie (למשרא) knots. (MT Dan 5,16a)

That the reading tradition was also uncomfortable with bare infinitives is clear from the vocalization of the G-stem (*pe'al*) infinitives as מִפְשַׁר and

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[25] T.L. HOLM, "The Sheikh Fadl Inscription in Its Literary and Historical Context", *AraSt* 5 (2007) 193-224, here 201.

[26] KOTTSIEPER, *Aḥiqarsprüche*; H. GZELLA, *A Cultural History of Aramaic. From the Beginnings to the Advent of Islam* (HdO 111; Leiden 2015) 151.

[27] H. BAUER – P. LEANDER, *Grammatik des Biblisch-Aramäischen* (Halle an der Saale 1927) §§ 26i. Contrast the use of the preposition ל in a syntactically similar position in Ezra 4,14: "and it is not fitting for us to see (למחזא) the dishonor of the king".

מְשָׁרֵא, as if they were D-stem (*pa'el*) participles, even though this is nonsensical in the context [28]. Only the C-stem (*aph'el*) infinitive אַחֲוָיַת was vocalized correctly, since no alternative was available [29].

In Imperial Aramaic, the infinitive is also commonly preceded by ל. As the only examples of a bare infinitive used as the subject of a clause, Muraoka – Porten cite two phrases from the Proverbs of Ahiqar: "for it is not in the hands of men to lift their foot (מנשא רגלהם) and put them down (ומנחתותהם) […] for it is not in your hands to lift your foot (מנשא רגלך) to put it down (*n.b.* למנחתותה)" [30]. It thus appears to be limited to the older language of the proverbs proper. The use of this construction in Dan 5,12 can therefore rightly be called archaic.

CONCLUSION

We have examined two issues that bear on the dating of Daniel 5. As we have seen, the mentions of Nebuchadnezzar can all be seen as secondary, while the passage featuring the queen contains a number of remarkably archaic linguistic features. In the conclusion of this paper, let us consider a few other relevant issues.

On the literary side of things, the core narrative of Daniel 5* is not only free of historical inaccuracies [31], but also contains several details that match its historical setting quite well. The presence of the queen-mother as an important figure at the court may reflect the influential role played

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[28] ROSENTHAL, *Biblical Aramaic*, § 111, hesitantly considers that these may be "further infinitive formations of the derived conjugations". These would then be formally unparalleled elsewhere in Aramaic. An anonymous reviewer of this article suggests that the vocalization may be related to the shift of G-stem to D-stem verbs that may be observed in post-Biblical Hebrew. Note, however, that the arguably later infinitives in v. 16 are unproblematically vocalized as G-stems.

[29] Strictly speaking, the *aph'el* (C-stem with an א or zero in the prefix) is less archaic than the *haph'el* (C-stem with ה in the prefix), as remarked by an anonymous reviewer. Both forms already occur in late Old Aramaic and in Imperial Aramaic, however. In Imperial Aramaic, "a given verb is spelled in the same tense and by the same scribe indiscriminately with an Alef or a He"; MURAOKA – PORTEN, *Egyptian Aramaic*, § 28. Hence, the technically innovative use of א is not out of place among the archaisms in this passage. The vocalization of the infinitive ending in construct as -*aṯ* against expected -*ūṯ* is striking, but not obviously archaic or innovative, unless it is in response to the archaic defective spelling of *ʔaḥwāyūt* as אחוית, a possibility suggested by the reviewer.

[30] MURAOKA – PORTEN, *Egyptian Aramaic*, § 56i.

[31] The closing verse describing Belshazzar's death and the fall of the Babylonian Empire probably does not match the historical events. Following certain scholars, however, I would identify this as a redactional insertion; see E. HAAG, *Die Errettung Daniels aus der Löwengrube. Untersuchungen zum Ursprung der biblischen Danieltradition* (SBS 110; Stuttgart 1983) 34.

by Nabonidus' mother Adda-guppi [32]. Besides purple clothing and a golden necklace, Daniel's reward consists of authority תלתא במלכות, a phrase which probably should be translated as "as the third in the kingdom" [33]. Three is a common number in legends, but *a priori* we might expect Daniel to be made viceroy, second only to the king himself like Joseph in Egypt (Gen 41,41-44). But the position of third-in-command makes sense in the historical context, with the absent Nabonidus retaining the king-ship, Belshazzar ruling as his vice-regent, and Daniel — so the story tells us — in third place as Belshazzar's direct subordinate. Finally, there is the figure of Belshazzar himself, who did not make a lasting impression in other sources; that Daniel 5 knows of him at all points to some histori-cally accurate knowledge of the sixth century, whether this was passed down in writing or orally [34].

Linguistically, the use of archaic features dating to Imperial Aramaic and even earlier dialects is striking. It would be an exaggeration to say that the core narrative of Daniel 5 presents itself in a purely Imperial Aramaic form. As in the rest of the Biblical Aramaic corpus, a number of Imperial Aramaic spelling conventions have been abandoned, such as the spelling of *d (originally *$ð$) in certain words with ז (Biblical Aramaic: ד) and the mostly defective spelling of the masculine plural absolute state ending ן- (Biblical Aramaic virtually always plene, ין-). An interesting feature is the spelling of three radicals in the word עללת "she entered" (Dan 5,10). This contrasts both with later Aramaic, cf. the *qere* form עַלַּת *ʕallat, and with the attested Imperial Aramaic masculine plural form עלו *ġallū. It also contrasts with Dan 6,19 נַדַּת "it (f.) fled", showing that this is not simply the regular form in Biblical Aramaic. Since no relevant forms are attested in Old Aramaic [35], עללת could be another pre-Imperial Aramaic archaism (cf. Biblical Hebrew סבב "he turned"), but this is obviously an argument from silence.

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[32] COLLINS, *Daniel*, 248.

[33] V. 7 reads תלתי instead of תלתא, which further complicates our understanding of this not completely transparent word. As I hope to argue elsewhere, however, the passage fea-turing the mantic experts in vv. 7-9 is another likely example of secondary interpolation, which explains this inconsistency. The word תלתא itself should perhaps be seen as an adverb "thirdly", combining the base form of the numeral *talāt "three" with the adverbial ending *-ā also seen in כלא *kull-ā "entirely", יתירא *yattīr-ā "exceedingly", and other words; see A.M. BUTTS, "An Aramaic Cognate to Akkadian -iš, Hebrew -ɔ, and Ugaritic -h", *"Like ʾIlu Are You Wise"*. Studies in Northwest Semitic Languages and Literatures in Honor of Dennis G. Pardee (eds. H.H. HARDY II – J. LAM – E.D. REYMOND) (Chicago, IL forthcoming).

[34] See COLLINS, *Daniel*, 33.

[35] SEGERT, *Altaramäische Grammatik*, 284.

The two topics of historical accuracy and linguistic archaism meet in the question why it is precisely in vv. 10-12 that we find a clustering of special features. I see three possible solutions. Least excitingly, this may simply be a coincidence; the core narrative of Daniel 5* is not very long, and other archaisms may be lacking by chance. Second, we could think of a source-critical solution. The passage involving the queen is much shorter and phrased differently in OG, which might indicate that some or all of it is interpolated; another indication in this direction is the slight inconsistency between the verbs for "to change" used in v. 6 (שנו*, G-stem/*pe'al*) and v. 10 (ישתנו, tD-stem/*etpa'al*). Perhaps this inter-polator had a penchant for archaism or reused an older text fragment. In that case, of course, the archaic language does not bear on the age of Daniel 5* in its oldest form. But if we do prefer to see vv. 10-12 as belonging to the oldest layer of Daniel 5*, a third option is that the writer purposefully used archaisms here for literary effect, highlighting the queen's age compared to Belshazzar. This would provide linguistic support for the common opinion that the queen is not Belshazzar's wife, but his father's wife, widow, or mother, and further solidify the connection with the historical figure of Adda-guppi. The archaisms then do not directly reflect the language as it was normally used in the author's day, although they must still have been known at that time — something that was no longer the case for all of these features when the Biblical Aramaic reading tradition was fixed.

Linguistic dating of biblical texts remains a perilous endeavor [36], as does dating them based on limited historical data. We should be hesitant to categorically state that Daniel 5* was composed soon after the fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. In the absence of clear indicators of lateness, however, the preservation of accurate historical data and linguistic features from the sixth century make this an attractive point of departure for the dating of Daniel 5*.

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[36] See, e.g., the important contributions to the ongoing debate made by I. YOUNG – R. REZETKO – M. EHRENSVÄRD, *Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts* (London 2008); C. MILLER-NAUDÉ – Z. ZEVIT (eds.), *Diachrony in Biblical Hebrew* (LSAWS 8; Winona Lake, IN 2012); R.S. HENDEL – J. JOOSTEN, *How Old is the Hebrew Bible? A Linguistic, Textual, and Historical Study* (AYBRL; New Haven, CT 2018).

SUMMARY

Daniel 5 contains a number of historical inaccuracies, most glaringly the identi-
fication of Nebuchadnezzar as Belshazzar's father. This article argues that all men-
tions of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 5 may be secondary, suggesting that the oldest
version of the text could have been written soon after the Neo-Babylonian period.
The queen's speech in vv. 10-12 contains a number of archaic linguistic features
which may support such an early dating. These are the use of a morphologically
distinct jussive, the use of two perfects in the expression "she spoke, saying",
and the use of infinitives without a preceding preposition.