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Truth and Writing in Daniel: Memories of Persian Media
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TRUTH AND WRITING IN DANIEL: MEMORIES OF PERSIAN MEDIA*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The book of Daniel, ultimately a product of the Seleucid period, of-fers a sustained meditation on complex expressions of foreign impe-rial power. Scholars have for the past few decades explored the book from this angle, asking important questions about how Daniel re-sponds to and represents empire.[1] In this article, we refine this ques-tion by asking how Daniel represents Persia *as a particular imperial power.* We suggest that a crucial part of the book's depiction of Persia relates to its reputation—both real and constructed—as an empire of writing. This, we claim, stands in sharp contrast to how the Neo-Babylonian empire is described in the book. Babylonian rule is marked by monumental media while Persia, in both the Court Tales and the Visions, is an empire in which mobile writing flourished. Persia's text-centered rule, we suggest, was worthy of emulation in the minds of the book's authors. This media-centric contrast be-tween Babylon and Persia was mobilized toward a particular end in the authors' Seleucid present: the Seleucid empire was identified with

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[1] In addition to the works cited below, see Danna Nolan Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty: A Story of Stories in Daniel 1–6* (Sheffield, England: Almond Press, 1988); Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, "Prayers and Dreams: Power and Diaspora Identities in the Social Setting of the Daniel Tales," in *The Book of Daniel, Volume 1: Composition and Reception,* ed. John J. Collins and Peter Flint (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 266–90; Shane Kirkpatrick, *Competing for Honor: A Social-Scientific Reading of Daniel 1–6* (Leiden: Brill, 2021); Daniel M. Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions: A Satirical Reading of Daniel 1–6* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008); Jin Hee Han, *Daniel's Spiel: Apocalyptic Literacy in the Book of Daniel* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2008).

Babylon, and the Persian past offered a textually-focused alternative to Seleucid rule. Important for the authors' construction of this alternative is the notion of truth, which can be guaranteed through circulatable writing. This is, crucially, a valorization of Persian media styles and practices, not of Persia per se. Persia is not being proportionately valorized as Babylon-as-Seleucia is disparaged. Yet Persia's distinctive media practices are vaunted as a more adequate means of circulating the divine truth that Daniel espouses.

2. PERSIAN MEDIA PRACTICE

The premises enumerated above—that the Daniel collection is a Seleucid-era product and meditates on the complexity of empire—structure much of Daniel scholarship. However, they can give way to a further set of claims or presumptions: that the Daniel collection considers "empire" as an undifferentiated monolith to be worked with or against; and that its political representations are a cipher for one imperial entity in particular: say, the Seleucids. For example, Paul Kosmin in his recent book, *Time and Its Adversaries in the Seleucid Empire,* has made a compelling case that the Daniel collection as a whole reflects—and speaks back to—the unique temporal fashionings of the Seleucid era.[2] While we acknowledge the crucial challenge and corrective that Kosmin has offered in our reading of Seleucid-era texts, we argue that the authors and editors of Daniel are still able to think otherwise than and outside of Seleucid conventions and practices.[3] In other words, the imagination of the Hellenistic tradents of the Daniel collection is not bound to only Hellenistic ideas about

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[2] Paul J. Kosmin, *Time and Its Adversaries in the Seleucid Empire* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), 139–46.

[3] Our critique applies likewise to those, such as Carol Newsom and Reinhard Kratz, who have suggested that the Babylonian elements of the Daniel narratives—those about Nebuchadnezzar (himself a cipher for Nabonidus) in particular—must be traced back to authentic memories from the 6th-century BCE context of exile (see Carol A. Newsom, "Why Nabonidus? Excavating Traditions From Qumran, The Hebrew Bible, and Neo-Babylonian Sources," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Sarianna Metso, Hindy Najman, and Eileen Schuller [Leiden: Brill, 2010], 57–79; Carol A. Newsom, *Daniel: A Commentary* [Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014], 129–30; Reinhard Kratz, "Nabonid in Qumran," in *Babylon: Wissenskultur in Orient und Okzident*, ed. Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum, Margarete van Ess, and Joachim Marzahn [Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2011], 253–71). As elaborated below, we prefer instead, Caroline Waerzeggers's approach which raises "the possibility of considering a more collateral, synchronic development—one that engaged literary communities across regions" (Caroline Waerzeggers, "The *Prayer of Nabonidus* in the Light of Hellenistic Babylonian Literature," in *Jewish Cultural Encounters in the Ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern World*, ed. Mladen Popović, Myles Schoonover, and Marijn Vandenberghe [Leiden: Brill, 2017], 64–75, here 65).

imperial rule. The organizing questions of our essay are: *what is distinctly Persian about the representation of Persia in Daniel?* And what does this representation of Persia accomplish in the Seleucid context of the book's production? How, in other words, might Hellenistic Jewish writers mobilize specific ideas about Persian culture rather than indexing all imperial forms to the Seleucids?

Our focus is Danielic representations of imperial media: Babylonian forms of media on the one hand and Persian media on the other. We argue that Daniel 1–5, set in the Babylonian empire, indicates a concern for the exertion of power through monumental forms of media. Daniel 9–12, by contrast, set in the reigns of Darius and Cyrus, emphasizes circulable writing as fundamental to universal order. We argue, moreover, that Daniel 6, set in the reign of Darius, acts as a hinge between the two halves of the book and their attendant foci on these different forms of mediation. Central to the investigation here is attention to the variety of notions of "truth" (אמת/קשט) that surface in the two halves of the book. We suggest ultimately that the book of Daniel reflects memories of the Persian empire's reputation for order, one that is guaranteed through writing.

Persia is remembered in the Seleucid period as a distinctively text-focused media culture.[4] To make an argument about Persia's Hellenistic-era reputation is not the same as staking a claim about the reality of Persian media practice (that is, how intensively Persians engaged in written media relative to their cultural contemporaries, predecessors, or successors).[5] Yet the lines between historical reality and reputation can themselves be blurry.[6] Take, for example, Herod-

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[4] As Don Polaski has pointed out, writing is a contingent and not a natural or inevitable way to wield political authority (Donald C. Polaski, "What Mean These Stones? Inscriptions, Textuality and Power in Persia and Yehud," in *Approaching Yehud: New Approaches to the Study of the Persian Period*, ed. Jon L. Berquist [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007], 37). See also Jason M. Silverman, "Are the Concepts of 'Torah' and 'the Prophets' Texts or Something Else? Educational, Media, and Elite Contexts from the Persian Empire Onwards," in *Scriptures in the Making: Texts and Their Transmission in Late Second Temple Judaism*, ed. Raimo Hakola, Jessi Orpana, and Paavo Huotari (Leuven: Peeters Publishing, 2022), 3–32, here 3, see also 10–17.

[5] The fact that Daniel may remember Persia as a distinctly text-focused media culture does not preclude the possibility that Persia, either in memory or in actual fact, shares much with its imperial predecessors. Anne Fitzpatrick-McKinley argues, for example, that Persia's textual culture shares much with its Neo-Assyrian forebearers (Anne Fitzpatrick-McKinley, *Empire, Power, and Indigenous Elites* [Leiden: Brill, 2015], 56–58). On the complex cultural import of 3rd–1st millennium Babylonian systems of writing, for example, see Marc Van De Mieroop, *Before and after Babel: Writing as Resistance in Ancient Near Eastern Empires* (New York: Oxford, 2022).

[6] Caroline Waerzeggers's discussion of the Prayer of Nabonidus and the Nabonidus Chronicle is instructive here. Texts (as she argues the Prayer and the NC are) that are fully the products of the Seleucid or post-Seleucid

otus and Xenophon's 5th and 4th century accounts of the Persian postal service. This organization was, claims Xenophon, Cyrus's unique innovation, crafted to "cope with the magnitude of his empire" (*Cyr.* 8.6.18). Xenophon and Herodotus agree that this institution relays text across the empire with unprecedented speed (though Xenophon admits that some reports might be exaggerations).[7] These accounts of the Persian postal service tend to be interpreted as reflections of authentic Persian practice, but they are also (and more crucially for our purposes) reflections of an emerging discourse about "Persianness"—that is, a Persian reputation for a distinctively intense use of text media to choreograph and signify its power.[8]

Even writing produced within Persia may fall under this category of forging "Persianness" and, specifically, crafting an image of an intense relationship between Persia and writing. Darius I's much-discussed Behistun inscription is a site of Persian writing's reputed power: its distance from the ground renders the writing "visible yet not legible."[9] Yet perhaps the contents are, at this site at least, beside the point.[10] The visible writing may project an analogous message to

era may preserve distinctive (even accurate) memories of an earlier era (Caroline Waerzeggers, "Facts, Propaganda, or History? Shaping Political Memory in the Nabonidus Chronicle" in *Political Memory In and After the Persian Empire*, ed. Jason M. Silverman and Caroline Waerzeggers [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2015], 95–124; Waerzeggers, "Prayer of Nabonidus").

[7] "There is nothing mortal that accomplishes a course more swiftly than do these messengers" (Herodotus, *Hist.* 8.98). See also Xenophon, *Cyr.* 8.6.18–19.

[8] Cameron Howard has argued that the Persians deployed two major modes of text-power: the bureaucratic and the iconic (Cameron B.R. Howard, "Writing Yehud: Textuality Under Persian Rule" [PhD dissertation, Emory University, 2010], 50). Howard discusses Old Persian traces in Aramaic administrative language (see Howard, "Writing Yehud," 56–58), especially the language for "public official document" (פתגם) and official copy (פרשגן). See Xenophon, *Cyr.* 8.6.17. and Herodotus, *Hist.* 8.98; discussed in Howard, "Writing Yehud," 61–65. On the link between the king and his letters in Daniel 6, see Donald C. Polaski, "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin: Writing and Resistance in Daniel 5 and 6," *JBL* 123 (2004): 649–69, here 663.

[9] Polaski, "What Mean These Stones?" 38.

[10] But, of course, the inscription *was also* read: it was evidently circulated multilingually in mobile letter forms, perhaps by means of the Persian-innovated royal mail system (Jason M. Silverman, *Persepolis and Jerusalem: Iranian Influence on the Apocalyptic Hermeneutic* [New York: T&T Clark, 2012], 88–89; Howard, "Writing Yehud," 57–62). As the inscription itself avers: "Afterwards I [Darius] have sent this form of writing everywhere into the countries. The people strove (to use it)." (Rüdiger Schmitt, *The Bisitun Inscriptions of Darius the Great: Old Persian Text*, vol. 1, Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum [London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1991], 73 [DB IV 90–92 §70]). Indeed, multilingual, circulable administrative writing, argues Jason Silverman, formed the bedrock of Persian imperial administration, generating the expansion of a scribal class and, eventually perhaps,

the accompanying image of Darius towering over his subject peoples: the presence of *text itself* is part and parcel of how the message of Persian domination over its subject people and their knowledge was mediated to its many publics, not only at the moment of its production, but communicated over the course of generations. The Behistun inscription is, in other words, not just a product of actual Persian media practice, it is also a participant in the production of ideas and memories about Persia's "hypertextual" media culture.[11]

The Persian Empire was of course not devoid of monumental media.[12] Some of the best surviving examples of monumental art from the Ancient Near East come from Persia, and from Persepolis in particular. It does appear, however, that the Persian Empire was unique in its embrace of circulatable media, both textual but also visual. The wide distribution of cylinder seals in the empire, for instance, has been described by Elspeth Dusinberre as "elite portable culture," another possible manifestation of our spotlight on the mobility of Persian media.[13]

The biblical books of Ezra-Nehemiah seem to trade in a similar set of assumptions about Persian media culture, and specifically its focus on text. The plot of Ezra 1–6 hinges on the circulation of imperially-issued texts, the discovery of which depends on the idea of a sprawling network of Persian archives.[14] The point here is not necessarily one about verifiable historical reality–in this case, that a copy of Cyrus's edict was actually kept in a repository in Ecbatana (Ezra 6:2)–but that the authors of Ezra imagined the Persians to be dedicated curators of texts.[15] In other words, we are not claiming either that the passages that talk about Media-Persia (especially, say, in Daniel 6) are Persian-era texts or that the presumably Seleucid texts that represent Persia in Daniel are necessarily "authentic memories." What we are claiming is that there is an attempt in Daniel to write

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touching off the textualization of what would become Judean scriptures (Silverman, "Concepts of 'Torah' and 'Prophets'," 10–17).

[11] Cameron Howard has formulated this term to describe Persian media culture. See Howard, "Writing Yehud," 4, 62–75.

[12] Margaret Cool Root has explored "official" monumental art in the Achaemenid heartland and the imperial ideology in which it participates. See Margaret Cool Root, *The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art: Essays in the Creation of an Iconography of Empire*, vol. 19 (Leuven: Peeters, 2021), 1–5, 309–11, discussed in Justin J. White, *The Poetics of Visuality: Ekphrasis, Material Agency, and the Visual Imagination of Biblical Antiquity*. FAT I (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2024), 152-7.

[13] Elspeth R. M. Dusinberre, *Empire, Authority, and Autonomy in Achaemenid Anatolia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 69. Also discussed in White, *Poetics of Visuality*, 152.

[14] Persian approval of the reconstruction of the Judean temple depends on the rediscovery of Cyrus's edict in Ecbatana (though it was thought to have been left in Babylonia) (Ezra 6:1–2).

[15] Laura Carlson Hasler, *Archival Historiography in Jewish Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

Persianly about Persia. Exploring what we know about Persian media practice is a good place to begin thinking with these authors about their attempt to represent, even mobilize, this empire's distinctive media culture and its entangled ideas about writing and truth.[16] In other words, how are Hellenistic Jewish writers putting memories of Persian practice to work? We argue that the Seleucid-era Daniel collection represents and valorizes a text-focused Persian media culture in contrast to its Babylonian counterparts.[17]

3. DANIEL 1–5 AND BABYLONIAN (SELEUCID) MEDIA CULTURE

Daniel's meditations on Persian media culture are set in sharp contrast to Babylonian expressions of power by means of monumentality. In the Court Tales of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar are Babylonian monarchs who remain focused on monumental forms of imperial messaging, which (as we will explore below) are fundamentally incapable of expressing universal divine truths. Monumentality surfaces in the first chapters of Daniel as a fixture of Babylonian media.[18] Nebuchadnezzar's famous dream-interpretation contest culminates, in Daniel 2, with an image that a Babylonian king might plausibly dream up: a humanoid statue. The facts that Nebuchadnezzar cannot "read" this statue without assistance, and that it is momentously deconstructed "not by human hands" are both comments on Babylonian obsession with *and* ineptitude in making sense of monumental forms of media (2:34–35).[19]

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[16] The specific contours of truth will be explicated in the second half of this essay when addressing Daniel 7–12.

[17] Daniel's Persian "memories" are undoubtedly politically charged. See Eckhardt's argument that the Hasmonean-era representations of the Seleucids in both Ezra-Neh and 1 Macc attempts to pillory them in contrast with an idealized Persian past (Benedikt Eckhardt, "Achaemenid Religious Policy after the Seleucid Decline: Case Studies in Political Memory and New Eastern Dynastic Representation," in *Political Memory In and After the Persian Empire*, ed. Jason M. Silverman and Caroline Waerzeggers [Atlanta: SBL Press, 2013], 269–98).

[18] The very first thing we hear about Nebuchadnezzar are his acts of siege (of Jerusalem; Dan 1:1), his seizure of sacred objects (temple vessels; Dan 1:2), and their assembly within a treasury (that is, bringing these stolen vessels into the temple storehouse [אוצר אלהיו; Dan 1:2]). Later, when his counselors fail to recount and interpret his disturbing dream, Nebuchadnezzar threatens the counselors' homes. Our first moments with Nebuchadnezzar offer glimpses of a preoccupation with mastery expressed by means of monumentality: besieging cities, seizing and housing sacred objects, and dismantling dwellings are primary ways of unmaking colonized subjects and bolstering Babylonian authority.

[19] Kosmin likewise interprets the monumental images of Dan 2–3 as figuring the transitoriness of imperial power: "as with Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the same statues that at first view expressed the fixity and perma-

Daniel 1–2 satirizes Babylon's imagined obsession with statuary, especially statuary's limited power to convey universal truth. This continues in Daniel 3. Here, Nebuchadnezzar's spindly statue of gold (3:1) fails to compel the loyalty of Daniel's companions. In Daniel 4, Nebuchadnezzar once again dreams of his own power in terms of fragile monumentality, though of a naturalistic kind: he is figured as the tallest tree on earth which, though visible to all, is cut down by divine decree (Dan 4:22–23). In Daniel 5, Babylonian obsession with monumental media finds its dramatic undoing in writing. The authors introduce Belshazzar's Babylon with the note that he and his courtiers worship gods made with all manner of construction materials (5:4), each of which parallel Nebuchadnezzar's dream statue materials except for clay. Belshazzar's party is then interrupted, and the king himself is undone by the appearance of a disembodied hand that writes (Dan 5:25–28).

Babylonian materiality—and specifically monumentality—are at the crosshairs of the authors' satirical portrayal of Babylon and its devotional media proclivities.[20] Both Babylonian monarchs command fealty to building materials that do not—and indeed *cannot*—give adequate expression to Daniel's message of divine universal dominion. Monuments and statues can only beget limited, provincial devotion, their message extending only to those who can see them. In their immobility, in other words, they cannot be universal. By contrast, language that is written and circulated *can* attest to Daniel's perceived truth of his god's universal rule. In short, the Babylonian Court Tales of Daniel 1–5 show us a negative version of the lesson that medium and message are inextricably linked.

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nence of political power were among the chief media for exposing its transitoriness" (Kosmin, *Time and Its Adversaries*, 146.) This fragile monumental media, he argues, is ultimately a cipher for Seleucid media technologies (Kosmin, *Time and Its Adversaries*, 145–46.) The connection between Babylonian and Seleucid representations will be discussed further below.

[20] We might think of *Bel and the Dragon* against this backdrop as well. These idol parodies, possibly composed in the Seleucid period (see the discussion in John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Hermeneia [Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1994], 418–19), treat more directly the failures of this monumentality, with their exposure of the statue and animal as non-deities. It is not a coincidence that these stories take place among the Babylonians. While the Theodotian version begins in the reign of "Cyrus the Persian" (v. 1), this is likely a later insertion, as this detail is missing from the Old Greek (Collins, *Daniel*, 410). In any case, both OG and Theodotian are set, beginning in v. 3, among the Babylonians. The close link between the end of the *Dragon* story and Dan 6—both about Daniel in the lions' den—likewise highlights well a major difference: in what are very similar episodes, Darius in Dan 6 *writes* while the unnamed Babylonian king in the *Dragon* does not. See our discussion of Dan 6 below.

4. TRUTH IN WRITING IN THE MEDIAN-PERSIAN COURT (DANIEL 6)

As Babylon crumbles, another empire rises and, with it, another media culture more potent than its predecessor.[21] Here, we argue that Daniel 6 signals a transition from monumental to (at least from the perspective of the authors of Daniel) more adequate means of mediating knowledge and power.

Unlike the precipitous ups and downs of the Babylonian court imagined in Daniel 1–5, the Median-Persian world is marked at the outset by organization.[22] In the first verses of Daniel 6, Darius institutes a sprawling bureaucratic system that mixes excess (120 satrapies) with good order.[23] We meet Daniel poised to become one of Darius's most powerful bureaucrats. In Darius's empire, the devotional mandates are directed toward the body of the king rather than monumental proxies (6:6–9). An effective postal system for circulating the king's wishes is implied (see Dan 6:25). In the court of Da-

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[21] Howard also contrasts Persian writing with the absence of writing in Babylon in the Daniel stories at Howard, "Writing Yehud," 72–74.

[22] Darius is referred to in Dan 6:1 (5:31 Eng; see also Dan 9:1, 11:1) as Darius the Mede (דריוש מדיא) as opposed to his eventual successor, Cyrus of Persia named (כורש פרסיא) in 6:29 (6:28 Eng). We nevertheless read Darius here as a cipher for Persian rule and culture. Darius was a known moniker for several Persian monarchs (I, II, and III), and identified as such in other parts of the biblical tradition (cf. Ezra 6:1; 13; 1 Esd 3:1). Darius's association with Media in Dan 6:1 is likely an attempt to conform the Court Tales to the Four Kingdom Schema (Dan 2:37–45) (see Collins, *Daniel,* 31). Collins suggests that "the original story undoubtedly referred to Darius I of Persia, who was noted for his organization of the satrapies" (Collins, *Daniel,* 264). Carol Newsom argues that "this change [from Darius I of Persia, who the story was originally about, to Darius the Mede] was perhaps facilitated by the prophetic tradition that the Medes would be the ones to attack and destroy Babylon (Isa 13:17; Jer 51:11, 28)" (Newsom, *Daniel,* 192). The ubiquity of the Medes in the widely-attested four-kingdom sequence outside of the book of Daniel also helps to explain the appearance of Darius the Mede. This story in Dan 6, in other words, originally about Darius the Persian, was repositioned in Daniel in order to conform with a more widely-known imperial sequence that often included the Medes. On the schema generally, see recently the essays in Andrew B. Perrin and Loren T. Stuckenbruck, eds., *Four Kingdom Motifs before and beyond the Book of Daniel,* vol. 28, Themes in Biblical Narrative: Jewish and Christian Traditions (Leiden: Brill, 2021). Justin White has demonstrated moreover that much of the imagery in this chapter—of the lions' den in particular—is distinctively Achaemenid (White, *Poetics of Visuality,* 140-163. See discussion below).

[23] On the idea of Persian iconography mediating a "completed" world order, see Brent A. Strawn, "'A World Under Control': Isaiah 60 and the Apadana Reliefs from Persepolis," in *Approaching Yehud,* ed. Jon L. Berquist (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 87–101.

rius, the threat that misapplied monumentality poses to Judean devotion has ostensibly receded.

One of the most obvious contrasts between Darius and the Babylonian kings is his literary competence. Instead of a king who cannot read, Darius is a king who writes, first signing declarations into law (6:10) and ultimately authoring them, too (6:26). The first declaration that the king signs does, of course, constitute a mortal threat to Daniel; not because of, as before, homicidal royal rage, but because the written word, in Media-Persia, overtakes even the king's own will. Though misapplied, the idea that "texts can kill" is an idea that the authors of Daniel 6 appear to take seriously.[24]

At the end of Daniel 6, Darius writes again. This time, however, Darius is not merely a signatory; he is an author of a letter with a clear circulation plan:[25]

באדין דריוש מלכא כתב לכל־עממיא אמיא ולשניא די־דארין בכל־
ארעא

Then Darius the king wrote to all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell on all the earth (Dan 6:26).

In the imagination of Daniel 6, the mobility of a circulated letter means that its message is universally available, not just to those within sight or earshot of imperial monuments and their attendants. Darius's new writ not only relies on the idea of an effective system for circulating texts, it also resonates with Don Polaski's formulation of the Persian "authorized copy."[26] Authoritative textual copying means that imperial messaging can circulate through space as well as time. The spatial reach of these copied proclamations is limitless. It is fitting, then, that this universally-mediated text espouses universal claims, according to Dan 6:27 which says:

מן קדמי שים טעם די בכל שלטן מלכותי להון זאעין ודחלין מן קדם
אלהה די דניאל די הוא אלהא חיא וקים לעלמין ומלכותה די לא
תתחבל ושלטנה עד סופא

I make a decree that in all my royal dominion people will tremble and fear before the god of Daniel: For he is the living god, enduring forever. His kingdom will never be destroyed, and his dominion has no end.

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[24] Carolyn J. Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 62. See also Polaski, "Mene, Mene," 661–64.

[25] All translations are adapted from the NRSV.

[26] Speaking of the copies of Darius I's Behistun inscription that were circulated and were, unlike the original, actually legible to a pedestrian viewer, Polaski writes: "All we can ever know are copies; all we can ever know is the craft of the scribe. Authoritative textuality means authoritative copying." Polaski, "What Mean These Stones?" 40. See also Howard, "Writing Yehud," 59.

The universal power of Daniel's god is narrated by means of the universal capacity of a mobile writing. As Darius's letter circulates everywhere, it fittingly expresses the perceived truth that Daniel's god endures temporally (קים לעלמין) and spatially (עד שלטנה סופא). Thus, finally, at the very end of the Court Tales, the medium fits the message more effectively; a more adequate form of media has been located in the court of the Medes and the Persians.

Justin White has illuminated the strong link between this Achaemenid royal imagery and Daniel 6. He documents the widespread depiction—in both monumental art in the Achaemenid heartland as well as cylinder seals distributed throughout the empire—of the contest scene in which a Persian king is shown subduing lions.[27] White reads the tale of the lions' den in Daniel 6, in which the Judean protagonist, rather than the king, defeats the lions, as an inversion of this ideology.[28] We would extend White's observations here by emphasizing two aspects of the tale. First, while it is indeed the case that the tale offers a resistant engagement with the widespread motif of the Persian king's victory over the lions, this apparently does not preclude a depiction of that same king in a positive light. Darius is no match for Daniel's god in this tale yet he is still responsible for spreading that deity's message (6:26) in writing. Second, the fact that Darius is depicted here as paradoxically both weak and effective aligns with our understanding of the program of the Daniel collection as a whole: memories of a distinctive Persian media culture are mobilized here to imagine an alternative to Seleucid rule. What may have originated, in other words, as a tale of resistance to the Persian Empire is crafted in the end in order to remember a Persian king who utilizes media more effectively than his Babylonian predecessors.

There is a case to be made that the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar does write (and writes *truthfully*) in the book of Daniel. Daniel Waller has argued that Daniel 1–4 discloses a gradual process of revelation whereby the Babylonian monarch "learns to endure reality" in all its brutality.[29] In a similar vein, it is worth noticing that in Dan-

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[27] See White, *Poetics of Visuality*, 142. "In its most common expression during the Persian period," writes White, "this scene depicts a central protagonist attempting to control two antithetically arranged lions. It is apparent this motif was originally part of the greater imperial artistic program of the Achaemenid Empire, which projected an ideology of imperial power and hierarchy by means of a distinct style articulated in various iconographic motifs."

[28] White, while noting the many parallels between the episode and Achaemenid art, does not come down firmly on the date of the tale. For our part, while we would allow for the origin of this tale in the Persian period itself, what is more intriguing for the purposes of this essay is the tale's engagement with these Persian traditions as the book is finalized in the Seleucid period.

[29] Daniel James Waller, "Sympathy for a Gentile King: Nebuchadnezzar, Exile, and Mortality in the Book of Daniel," *Biblical*

iel 1–4, at each episode's conclusion, Nebuchadnezzar draws ever closer to explicitly authoring mobile writing: in Daniel 2, the king pays verbal tribute to Daniel and his patron, saying: "in truth [מן-קשט] your god is the god of gods and ruler of kings and the revealer of mysteries" (2:47). In Dan 3:29, Nebuchadnezzar proclaims a decree prohibiting speech against the exiled Judeans' god, just as Darius proclaims a decree that all people fear the god of Daniel in Dan 6:27. This episode then culminates in a first-person declaration that even more strikingly resembles Darius's written missive:[30]

Dan 3:31–33	Dan 6:26–28
נבוכדנצר מלכא לכל עממיא אמיא ולשניא די דארין בכל ארעא שלמכון ישגא	באדין דריוש **מלכא** כתב **לכל עממיא אמיא ולשניא די דארין בכל ארעא שלמכון ישגא**
אתיא ותמהיא די עבד עמי אלהא עליא שפר קדמי להחויה	מן קדמי שים טעם די בכל שלטן מלכותי להון זאעין ודחלין מן קדם אלהה די דניאל די הוא אלהא חיא וקים לעלמין ומלכותה די לא תתחבל ושלטנה עד סופא
אתוהי כמה רברבין **ותמהוהי** כמ תקיפין מלכותה מלכות עלם ושלטנה עם דר ודר	משיזב ומצל ועבד **אתין ותמהין** בשמיא ובארעא די שיזיב לדניאל מן יד אריותא
Nebuchadnezzar **the king, to all peoples, nations, and languages that live on all the earth: may you have abundant prosperity!**	Then Darius **the king** wrote **to all peoples, nations, and languages that live on all the earth: may you have abundant prosperity!**
The signs and wonders that the most high god has worked for me I am pleased to recount.	I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people will tremble and fear before the god of Daniel: For he is the living god, enduring forever. His kingdom will never be destroyed, and his dominion has no end.
How great are **his signs**, how mighty **his wonders**! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his sovereignty is from generation to generation.	He delivers and rescues; he works **signs and wonders** in heaven and on earth; he has saved Daniel from the power of the lions.

There is a sense in which Nebuchadnezzar's decree in 3:31–33 appears as a first draft of Darius's longer circulated letter in Daniel 6. His final declaration in 4:31–32, 34, moreover, also bears resemblances to the above declarations, and describes the Most High god's

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Interpretation 28 (2020), 327–46, here 344.

[30] Or the final Nebuchadnezzar episode (Dan 4) begins, depending on Hebrew or English versification. Here we use Hebrew versification (Dan 3:31/Dan 4:1 [Eng]).

works as קשט (Dan 4:34), "truth" language that Daniel 7–12 will more consequentially develop through the Hebrew term אמת. Yet in contrast to Darius' explicit authoring of mobile directives at the conclusion of Daniel 6, Nebuchadnezzar moves ever closer to circulable writing and to the articulation of "truth" but never overtly carries it out. It is under the subsequent empire, according to Daniel's authors, that a worthy media landscape materializes.

Daniel 6 sets up the specific media conditions for "truth" concepts to emerge in the apocalyptic visions that follow. Daniel 7–12's linked ideas about writing and truth draw deeply from the author's reconstructions of a distinctive Persian media culture. In Daniel 6, Darius is cast in contrast with his Babylonian predecessors who cannot overcome their monumental impulses and the limitations they incur.

5. THE VISIONS AS PERSIAN "WRITTEN-TRUTH"

There are two aspects of the visions in Daniel 7–12 worth noting up front. First is that they do not—perhaps, we might argue, *cannot*—take place during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel 7 and 8 take place in the reign of Belshazzar, Daniel 9 in that of Darius, and the extended vision of chs. 10–12 during the reign of Cyrus. While Daniel certainly has some revelatory capacity during Nebuchadnezzar's reign as he interprets the king's dreams, he does not have his own visions. We might thus consider the monumentality of the Babylonian media environment as obstructing his own "vision." This is related to the second point, which is that the visions in chs. 7–12 highlight clearly their own writtenness from the very beginning:

> In the first year of King Belshazzar of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head as he lay in bed. Then he wrote down the dream: I, Daniel, saw in my vision by night the four winds of heaven stirring up the great sea… (Dan 7:1–2)

The first-person voice continues through the end of the report in Daniel 12, and thus these visions are presented as a copy of what Daniel inscribed during or after the visions contained in the report. Scholarship on the visions has not emphasized their timing within the narrative; that is, during the reigns of which kings these visions take place. A starting point for our thinking, however, is that we ought to take seriously the fact that these visions occur for Daniel around the transition from Babylonian to Persian rule, a period in the Court Tales which, as we saw, is marked by its heightened attention to written media in Daniel 5 and 6. The visionary writing of Daniel 7–12, in other words, is only possible once the media landscape begins to change, as power transitions from Babylon to Persia.

In combination with this association in the visions between Persia and writing, we want to draw out a third element that we alluded to above: truth. To be more specific, the word אמת comes up in the Visions in ways that seem to link it both to Persia and to writing.

Eibert Tigchelaar has recently attempted "to zoom in on the use and conceptualization of אֱמֶת in various texts, including the book of Daniel, from the Hellenistic and early Roman periods."[31] He sees a changing usage of אמת in the late Second Temple period, and suggests that the meaning of the term at this time is indebted to a development from Persian *aša/arta* to Aramaic קושטא to Hebrew אמת.[32] He renders Persian *aša/arta* as "the order of life," and highlights four ways in which the late Second-Temple use of אמת (in the Dead Sea Scrolls in particular) corresponds to this order: "(1) the notion of אמת as a cosmic principle, expressed in the texts in terms of foundation, (2) a semantic shift of אמת when used with regard to God, (3) אמת as an epistemological term, parallel to בינה and other terms, (4) אמת and קושטא as the core virtue."[33] Ultimately, Tigchelaar suggests that אמת in the Second Temple period comes to serve as "the *order* of creation"[34] or "the laws of nature,"[35] an understanding which, in Tigchelaar's view, is indebted to Persian *aša/arta*.[36] We might (on the flipside) nod here as well to Bruce Lincoln's work on the importance of "The Lie" as a structuring principle in the Behistun inscription.[37] We want to at least entertain the possibility, in other words, that Achaemenid ideas of truth/deceit linger behind Daniel's use of these terms, and we will suggest, moreover, that the second half of the book deliberately links its own writtenness to these ideas.

6. GOD'S אמת (OVER)THROWN: DAN 8:12

The Persian-inflected notion of God's אמת as universal order is important for understanding the apocalyptic vision of the ram and goat in Daniel 8. In 8:3–9, Daniel describes his vision in which there appears a two-horned ram who grows strong in every direction (8:3–4), after which a goat with a horn between its eyes comes from the west and tramples the ram (8:5–7). The goat's horn is then broken,

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[31] Eibert Tigchelaar, "Changing Truths: אֱמֶת and קֹשֶׁט as Core Concepts in the Second Temple Period," in *Congress Volume Stellenbosch 2016*, ed. Louis Jonker, Gideon Kotzé and Christl Maier (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 395–415, here 396.

[32] Ibid. 405, 14.

[33] Ibid. 406.

[34] Ibid. 412. Italics original.

[35] Ibid. 411.

[36] Note also the similar descriptions of the Persian program of imperial art as "images of power and hierarchical order" (Root, *King and Kingship*, 19, 1; John Boardman, *Persia and the West: An Archaeological Investigation of the Genesis of Achaemenid Art* [London: Thames & Hudson, 2000], 140–49; Mark B. Garrison, "Royal Achaemenid Iconography," in *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Iran*, ed. D.T. Potts [New York: Oxford University Press, 2013], 566–95, here 118. See also White, *Poetics of Visuality*, 152–53).

[37] Bruce Lincoln, *'Happiness for Mankind': Achaemenian Religion and the Imperial Project*, Acta Iranica (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 20–40.

four horns arise in its place, and a little horn comes out of one of these four after which it grows toward the south, east, and "the beautiful land" (8:8–9).[38] The remainder of the vision in 8:10–14 then describes the transgressions of the little horn and their duration. As Gabriel explains to Daniel in 8:20–22, this vision is a symbolic representation of the Median and Persian empires (ram with two horns), their destruction by the Greeks (goat) under Alexander (horn between the eyes), and the wars of the *diadochi* (four horns). The little horn is described by Gabriel only as a "bold-faced king" in the interpretation section but has been identified as Antiochus IV Epiphanes since as early as Josephus.[39]

Of key interest here is the list of transgressions that are attributed to Antiochus IV in the vision (8:10–12):

> It grew as high as the host of heaven. It threw down to the earth some of the host and some of the stars, and trampled on them. Even against the prince of the host it acted arrogantly; it took the regular burnt offering away from him and the place of his sanctuary was overthrown. Because of wickedness, the host was given over to it together with the regular burnt offering. It cast אמת to the ground. It acted. It succeeded. (Dan 8:10–12)

Scholarship has given much attention to the actions here depicted and their correspondence with what we know about the Antiochene persecution from Josephus, 1–2 Maccabees, and the visions in Daniel 7 and 11.[40] Especially important is the assertion in v. 11b that Antiochus stopped the daily offering (התמיד) and that the place of the sanctuary was overthrown, details that align with the depiction of the persecution in 1 Macc 1:45–46 and 2 Macc 6:5. Just as important, however, is the way in which these historical events are couched here in the vision. The seemingly straightforward description of the earthly transgressions in v. 11b is sandwiched between others in vv. 10–11a and 12 that stay on the symbolic level. This transposition of "the historical crisis of the Maccabean era to the supernatural plane" is foundational to the communicative agenda of the visions, as these two planes—if we are to separate them at all— are constantly intertwined.[41]

This intertwining of natural and supernatural, of king and host, heaven and earth, is encapsulated in the charge that sits as the height and conclusion of the list of Antiochus IV's transgressions here at the end of Dan 8:12: ותשלך אמת ארצה ועשתה והצליחה ("It cast אמת to the ground. It acted. It succeeded"). The stilted accumulation of verbs in this last verse conveys the lamentable situation just described, along with the near-disbelief of the narrator. God's אמת, the

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[38] Reading with the MT's ואל־הצבי. The OG reads ἐπὶ βορρᾶν ("against the north") while Theodotion reads πρὸς τὴν δύναμιν ("against the host").

[39] Collins, *Daniel*, 26 n. 258.

[40] For an overview, see Collins, *Daniel*, 62–66.

[41] Collins, *Daniel*, 343.

order that inheres in the universe by virtue of its divine formation, has been overthrown, a fact made manifest by the parallel over-throwing of the sanctuary just described.

While some have taken this curious occurrence of אמת as a ref-erence to the prohibition of Torah observance mentioned in 1 Macc 1:56, the passage is better understood against the backdrop of the discussion of אמת above.[42] As Newsom notes, "there is little evi-dence for this specific meaning of *'emet* [as synonymous with To-rah]."[43] She suggests instead that the term be understood here more abstractly as "the course of history as determined by God and . . . the proper relation of divine to human sovereignty . . . ".[44] This defini-tion is closer to our understanding of אמת as a universal order, but it is important to note that while אמת includes a determined course of history, it refers more broadly to the structure of reality in which that course of history plays out.[45] Thus, in casting אמת to the ground, Antiochus IV overturned completely the natural order of things.[46]

7. THE WRITING OF אמת (DANIEL 10–12)

The extended vision of Daniel 10–12, set during the reign of Cyrus, expands upon the importance of אמת by linking it with writing, and indeed with the book of Daniel itself. In contrast to the book's pre-vious symbolic visions of statues, trees, beasts, and animals (chs. 2, 4, 7, and 8, respectively), this vision is simply of a figure who tells Daniel what will happen in uncoded language: "Three more kings shall arise in Persia" (11:2), *not* "three horns will grow" (cf. Dan 8:8). Importantly, the declaration by this figure is itself introduced *as truth*:

[42] John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker, vol. 30 of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas, Texas: Work Books, 1989), 211; Collins, *Daniel*, 335; Louis F. Hartman and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel*, AB 23 (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1978), 226.

[43] Newsom, *Daniel*, 265–66.

[44] Newsom, *Daniel*, 266.

[45] Note similarly Tigchelaar's adjustment of Newsom's description: "[O]ne should more generally refer to the cosmo-political order which is disrupted" (Tigchelaar, "Changing Truths," 412).

[46] While she is not discussing Dan 8:12 in particular, Anathea Portier-Young's remarks about Seleucid state terror under Antiochus IV resonate well with our understanding of this verse: "Antiochus worked to dismantle the existing symbolic, social, and psychological foundations. . . of security, identity, order, and meaning for the people of Jerusalem, to create in their city and homes a 'space of death where reality is up for grabs,' and to im-pose upon this formless void an alternate and unholy world order of his own making" (Anathea E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011], 146–47). Portier-Young here quotes Michael Taussig, "Culture of Terror–Space of Death: Roger Casement's Putumayo Report and the Explanation of Torture," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26 (1984): 471.

דבר נגלה לדניאל אשר נקרא שמו בלטשאצר ואמת הדבר

A word was revealed to Daniel, who was called Belteshazzar, and the word was אמת (Dan 10:1).

Ch. 10 continues by setting the scene for the vision whose content is delivered in earnest in ch. 11, and it wraps up its preface by telling us that this speech by the figure in the vision is itself written elsewhere:

אבל אגיד לך את הרשום בכתב אמת

[I need to leave] but I am going to tell you what is inscribed in the written-אמת (Dan 10:21).

This concession on the part of the angel that the following discourse in chs. 11 and 12 constitutes not simply something that will come true, but rather a dictation of what has already been inscribed is an important claim within the book, one that deserves repeating in 11:2:

ועתה אמת אגיד לך הנה עוד שלשה מלכים עמדים

Now I will speak אמת to you: 'Three more kings will arise in Persia . . .'[47]

The material that comes in ch. 11, in other words, is not simply a continuation of the angel's speech, but is rather the angel's dictation of an otherwise existent written text. The angel is here quoting part of the כתב אמת, the *written-truth*. By recording here the words of the angel—which the angel is quoting from yet another inscription—the book of Daniel becomes a manifestation of this same אמת. While in the world of the narrative it is the angel's words in the vision that are given weight, it is Daniel's transcription of these same words in the book of Daniel that are given lasting significance.

This final vision in which אמת is transformed from something outside of the book into the book itself is also, as noted above, the only episode that takes place in the Persian empire. This process of the textualization of אמת that these chapters detail occurs in the third year of Cyrus (or his first year in the OG). In contrast to the visual and monumentalized certainty of the Babylonian kings in chs. 2–4 especially, the final chapters of the book hold up a textualized and mobile truth in the Persian Empire, and, we suggest, quite deliberately so. Persian ideologies of writing and truth are here being mobilized themselves toward a particular set of goals. These goals become apparent when considering the book's production in the Seleucid period.

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[47] We know of no translation that treats 11:2–45 as quoted speech, but it is an important part of the chapter's claim on our reading of it.

8. PERSIA AND BABYLONIA-AS-SELEUCIA

Caroline Waerzeggers has recently highlighted the ways in which Hellenistic-period scribes in Babylon reflected upon, even conducted "research" on, the Neo-Babylonian and Persian Empires of their pasts.[48] Situating the *Nabonidus Chronicle*, for instance, in the Hellenistic context of its manuscript, she reads this text as a reflection of the concerns of the priests of the Esagil Temple in this later period.[49] "As the priestly community of Esagil found itself once again in the position of renegotiating its position within a new set of power relations," she writes, "the past may have served both as a source of exempla for the present and as a means to forge community bonds and group identity."[50] This community's focus upon the transition of power from Nabonidus to Cyrus, in other words, was "a product of hopes and realities in the [Hellenistic] present,"[51] and these figures are thus presented in the text in accordance with a particular set of goals, not all of which may align with a rigid notion of historical accuracy.

An important aspect of these Hellenistic-era depictions of Babylonian and Persian rule, for Waerzeggers, is that they are multidimensional, even "deliberately ambiguous,"[52] rather than monolithic or simplistic. This applies to both Babylonian and Persian Empires of the past, and perhaps especially to the period of transition between them with Nabonidus and Cyrus. "There was a lively debate," Waerzeggers writes, "among Babylonian scholars in the Hellenistic age about the value and significance of Nabonidus's reign in the longue-durée of Babylonian history. The voices that contributed to this debate were located in different cities and social contexts, they disagreed with each other, and they creatively adapted and transformed existing sources into new texts."[53] Similarly, with respect to Achaemenid rule, there was "no discourse of explicit anti-Persian sentiment . . . "[54] and what we find instead, in Waerzeggers's words, "are the traces of a historical 'debate',"[55] marked by "ambiguity," "ambivalence," and even "covert criticism."[56]

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[48] See Waerzeggers, "Facts, Propaganda, or History?"; Caroline Waerzeggers, "Babylonian Kingship in the Persian Period: Performance and Reception," in *Exile and Return: The Babylonian Context*, ed. Jonathan Stökl and Caroline Waerzeggers (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), 95–124; Waerzeggers, "*Prayer of Nabonidus*." Waerzeggers describes these scribes as producing "original research" at "Babylonian Kingship," 211, and expands on the specific sources of this research at "Facts, Propaganda, or History?", 111–15.

[49] Waerzeggers, "Facts, Propaganda, or History?"

[50] Ibid., 118–19.

[51] Ibid., 119.

[52] Waerzeggers, "Babylonian Kingship," 217.

[53] Waerzeggers, "*Prayer of Nabonidus*," 3.

[54] Waerzeggers, "Babylonian Kingship," 204–5.

[55] Waerzeggers, "Babylonian Kingship," 218.

[56] Ibid.

We want to suggest here that the depiction of Persian rule in the book of Daniel, and of Persian media in particular, ought to be understood against this backdrop of a wider Ancient Near Eastern practice of reflection on the transition from Babylonian to Persian rule. Persian rule is depicted here as an idealized past in which order—truth, even—flourished through the circulation of written media. The Judean scribes responsible for the Daniel collection saw this form of imperial rule as preferable to the monumental and illiterate rule of the Babylonians as well as, we argue, the Seleucids of their present. This Seleucid-period depiction of the Persian and Babylonian pasts served for these scribes the aim of establishing a link between the Neo-Babylonians and the Seleucids, and a contrast with the Persians. This particular move is itself part of a wider trend, as Benedikt Eckhardt has recently shown. During and after the period of Seleucid decline, a variety of local populations invented Achaemenid policies of the past in order to envision their own futures. Eckhardt explores, in his words, "historical postulates of an Achaemenid religious policy, used to bolster the authority of post-Achaemenid, and more specifically post-Seleucid, royal dynasties."[57] The scribes responsible for the Daniel traditions played up, in other words, features of Persian rule in order to construct a post-Seleucid future.

This broader ancient Near Eastern trend of studying, and *shaping*, a Persian past in order to demonstrate the deficiency of the Seleucid present offers clarity to some aspects of the book of Daniel, such as Dan 8:12, which was explored above. Coming in the midst of the description of the little horn—a cipher for the Seleucid Antiochus IV—this verse reads:

<div dir="rtl">ותשלך אמת ארצה ועשתה והצליחה</div>

It threw אמת to the ground; it acted; it succeeded.

That a human king is capable of overturning universal order is remarkable. Again, reading in line with Tigchelaar's understanding of אמת in the Second Temple period, what is cast down is not merely Torah, but "the cosmo-political order."[58] We add here, in light of our preceding discussion, that this order is depicted in the book as having been established through Persian rule and its commitment to writing. Thus, in casting אמת to the ground, Antiochus IV disrupted the order of things, something that the previous regime had worked hard to solidify, again, through writing.

9. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

To summarize, we have suggested here that the book of Daniel sets up a contrast between Babylonian and Persian rule, particularly in the book's depiction of these respective empires' forms of media.

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[57] Eckhardt, "Achaemenid Religious Policy," 270.
[58] Tigchelaar, "Changing Truths," 412.

Babylonian media is monumental and provincial, and thus deficient, as it can inspire devotion only as far as one can view such a monument. Persian rule, by contrast, is marked by a hyper-ordered textuality that can be universally distributed. While Nebuchadnezzar's declarations in chs. 2–4 come close to articulating properly the dominion of Daniel's god, Babylonian monumentality is ultimately "undone" by writing in ch. 5.[59] The literate King Darius in ch. 6 is depicted, by contrast, quite positively.[60] He is shown at the end of Dan 6 wisely distributing the truth of this "living god's" universal dominion through the appropriate media: circulable writing.

It is thus around the period of transition into, and during, the reigns of Persian kings that Daniel's visionary and literary activity takes place. This activity is concerned with upholding, and—crucially—inscribing, "truth." While these depictions of Persian rule may have their basis in historical reality, they are mobilized here in order to understand the Jewish writers' Seleucid present, as the Seleucid kings are shown to adhere to Babylonian—and thus inferior—forms of messaging and dominion.

The connection that is posited in Daniel between Seleucid rule and Babylonian rule may also be drawing upon and responding to Seleucid ruling ideology itself. Indeed, other roughly contemporaneous Seleucid cultural artifacts—both literary and archaeological—align themselves with Babylonian culture.[61] These artifacts intimately connect a monarch with statuary and other monumental expressions

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[59] Polaski, "Mene, Mene," 660. On the nuanced portrayal of Nebuchadnezzar in these chapters, see Waller, "Sympathy for a Gentile King."

[60] We might even read the enigmatic Dan 11:1 against this backdrop: ". . . in the first year of Darius the Mede, I stood up to support and strengthen him." It's not clear whether the referent of לֹו ("him") here is Darius or the angel Michael from the preceding verse (10:21). Goldingay takes it as the latter, but we wonder if the former might hold in light of our argument here (*Daniel*, 293).

[61] The "Seleucus Romance," an "encomiastic and novelistic biographical tradition" about Seleucus I, preserved mostly in the works of 2nd-century CE historian Appian, presents the founder of the Seleucid dynasty in ways that highlight the centrality of Babylon (see Paul J. Kosmin, *The Land of Elephant Kings: Space, Territory, and Ideology in the Seleucid Empire* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014], 94); see, more generally, Daniel Ogden, *The Legend of Seleucus: Kingship, Narrative and Mythmaking in the Ancient World* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017]). Moreover, the Seleucids, in their founding of colonies throughout the Near East, seem to have adopted Babylonian conventions with respect to palace-city configuration, an urban plan in which "the Seleucid palace was incorporated into the body of the city. . . on the same ground level as the rest of the settlement and toward its edge" (Kosmin, *Land of Elephant Kings*, 226). For a map of Hellenistic Babylon, see R.J. van der Spek, "Multi-ethnicity and Ethnic Segregation in Hellenistic Babylon," in *Ethnic Constructs in Antiquity: The Role of Power and Tradition*, ed. T. Derks and N. Roymans, Amsterdam Archeological Studies (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 101–115, here 105.

of political authority.[62] Scholars have likewise argued for attempted historiographical connections between Nebuchadnezzar and particular Seleucid kings (namely, Antiochus I, via both the Antiochus Cylinder and the Hellenistic Babylonian writer, Berossus), even if the exact nature of these connections is debated.[63] The Court Tales of Daniel, we argue, partake of and parody this tradition, amplifying instead media modeled after reputed Persian formations.

It is important to note here too that the link established in Seleucid sources between their own rule and a Neo-Babylonian past is not happenstance. In other words, it is not the case that the Neo-Babylonian inflection of Seleucid ideology is limited to the heartland of the former empire: "the Seleucids were not just following local scripts, but also using Babylonian models to establish their imperial credentials far and wide."[64] Nor is it true that the Seleucids simply came into the region and picked up where the previous empire left off. If it were, they would have, of course, adapted Achaemenid rather than Neo-Babylonian customs as they shaped their own ruling ideology. In contrast, Johannes Haubold detects a "lack of enthusiasm" on the part of the Seleucids for Achaemenid traditions.[65] While the Seleucids may have "followed Persian precedent in practice, they also claimed to revive older traditions of empire which had been disrupted by the Achaemenids."[66] This is where we depart from Kos-

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[62] While Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the statue in Daniel 2 "has long been situated within a distinctly Jewish prophetic discourse and anti-idol polemic," Kosmin suggests instead that "the central image, which is without close parallel in the Hebrew Bible, should rather be understood within the developed Hellenistic political culture of statues" (Kosmin, *Time and Its Adversaries*, 145; see also, Kosmin, *Land of Elephant Kings*, 163). While there is not much extant evidence for such statuary from the Seleucid East, the Hellenistic West of the first four centuries BCE offers a number of examples. John Ma has explored these in detail, drawing out how honorific statues and their inscriptions work to "affirm civic ideology and its power" (John Ma, *Statues and Cities: Honorific Portraits and Civic Identity in the Hellenistic World* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013], 45).

[63] See Kathryn Stevens, *Between Greece and Babylonia: Hellenistic Intellectual History in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 220–23; Kathryn Stevens, "The Antiochus Cylinder, Babylonian Scholarship and Seleucid Imperial Ideology," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 134 (2014): 66–88; Johannes Haubold, *Greece and Mesopotamia: Dialogues in Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 135–42, 165–76; Paul J. Kosmin, "Seeing Double in Seleucid Babylonia: Rereading the Borsippa Cylinder of Antiochus I," in *Patterns of the Past*, ed. Alfonso Moreno and Rosalind Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 181–91.

[64] Haubold, *Greece and Mesopotamia*, 132.

[65] Ibid., 130n15.

[66] Ibid., 130. See also Michel Austin, "The Seleukids and Asia," in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World*, ed. Andrew Erskine (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005), 121–33, esp. 128: "[Any similarities between Persian and Seleukid rule] arose from similarity of circumstances

min and others with respect to the depiction of Persia in the book of Daniel. Rather than understanding Persian rule in Daniel as another cipher for the Seleucids, we argue that the Danielic scribes are setting up a contrast with a Persian past and a Seleucid present.[67]

This model finds support among scholars like Waerzeggers and Eckhardt who have drawn out the dynamics of mobilizing the past in order to legitimate certain views in the Hellenistic present. The book of Daniel fits well amidst this broader trend, as the Tales and the Visions confer on the problem of how to express truth most adequately. The result draws heavily from Persian terms for universal order as well as, possibly, on Persian-based caricatures of bookishness that do the work of highlighting the fragility of the Seleucid present. The authors of Daniel conclude that אמת (that is, the inexorable condition of global divine dominion) is, if not identical with mobile forms of writing, best expressed by means of it.

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rather than deliberate imitation. When Seleukid kings appealed to precedent to justify policy decisions, it is regularly their own ancestors who are invoked. . . but never the Persian kings. . . At Babylon Antiochos I. . . presented himself in the guise of a Babylonian king. But no Seleukid ruler ever contemplated linking himself to the Persian past." On Berossus' negative portrayal of Cyrus, see Haubold, *Greece and Mesopotamia*, 163–64.

[67] As noted above, Kosmin argues that Babylonian monumentality in Daniel is a thinly-veiled critique of Seleucid forms of media and governance (Kosmin, *Time and Its Adversaries* 145–6). Kosmin contends (of Daniel and contemporaneous Hellenistic Jewish texts): "it is, above all, the shared inhabiting of the Seleucid world, and not a particular social location, theological perspective, literary genre, or chain of influence, that undergirds the common concerns and structures of these works" (Kosmin, *Time and Its Adversaries*, 139). Yet Kosmin also acknowledges that the authors of Daniel differentiate among the imperial entities they represent: "Many of the formal and theological differences between the book's two halves—Aramaic Court Tales and Hebrew apocalyptic visions— in fact work to construct this distinction between the Seleucid empire and its predecessors" (Kosmin, *Time and Its Adversaries*, 160). This paper, in many ways, seeks to press into this latter claim, arguing that that Seleucid-era Judean writers are thinking diversely and comparatively among empires, especially between Babylon (-as-Seleucia) and Persian-Median regimes.