

HOLDING ON TO DANIEL'S COURT TALES

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I. DANIEL IN THE CRITICS' COURT

Probably no other conclusion concerning the writing of the book of Daniel has been so widely embraced than that the composition of its first six chapters is to be sharply distinguished from that of the latter half of the book. Indeed J. J. Collins observes: "The first six chapters of the book contain material which is older than the later chapters, and this material has been re-edited in Maccabean times to attain a redactional unity with the apocalyptic vision of chs. 7-12."¹ Although this opinion falls somewhat short of universal acceptance,² it may be taken as established that the vast majority of critical scholarship holds that the final form of the book of Daniel is a second-century-BC—hence predominantly Maccabean—product, either through the work of one author/editor³ or as a result of a final redactor who reworked the earlier material.⁴ Even a widely-used, conservative

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¹ J. J. Collins, "The Court-Tales in Daniel and the Development of Apocalyptic," *JBL* 94 (1975) 218.

² R. H. Pfeiffer (*Introduction to the Old Testament* [New York: Harper, 1941] 764) concludes that "there is no compelling reason to ascribe the two parts of the book to different authors. On the contrary, all its parts, either through the example of strict observance of Jewish Law in times of persecution or through the alluring promise of the imminent advent of the Kingdom of God superseding the four successive pagan empires (2:34f., 44f.; 7:9-14, 26f.), have the purpose of encouraging the faithful to remain steadfast during the tribulations of the years 168-165, and to trust in the invincible power of their God." The classic expression of the single-author, second-century-BC theory is that of H. H. Rowley, "The Unity of the Book of Daniel," *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament* (rev. ed.; London: Oxford, 1965) 240-280. Rowley catalogs the literary characteristics and elements of mental perspective that argue overwhelmingly for commonality of authorship.

³ Cf. e.g. J. J. Collins, "Daniel and His Social World," *Interpreting the Prophets* (ed. J. L. Mays and P. J. Achtemeier; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 250; S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (rev. ed.; New York: Scribner's, 1950) 511; S. B. Frost, "Daniel," *IDB* 1.764; J. H. Hayes, *An Introduction to Old Testament Study* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979) 370-371; A. Lenglet, "La structure littéraire de Daniel 2-7," *Bib* 53 (1972) 190; J. P. M. van der Ploeg, "Daniel," *The World of the Old Testament* (ed. A. S. van der Woude; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) 286-289.

⁴ Cf. e.g. H. L. Ginsberg, *Studies in Daniel* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1948) 27-40. Although seeing more literary unity than the usual multiple-authorship view, the position of L. F. Hartman and A. A. di Lella (*The Book of Daniel* [AB; Garden City: Doubleday, 1978] 16) essentially belongs here.

volume concludes: "Chs. 1–6, expressed in the third person, may well have been written by someone else about Daniel."⁵

While the book of Daniel is generally taken to have reached its final form in the second century BC, chaps. 1–6 are held to reflect an earlier period.⁶ Scholarly opinion has largely focused on the Greek period, no earlier than the third century BC. "Cc. 1–6 . . . are pre-Maccabean, composed in Babylonia: they may be roughly assigned to the 3d cent., to an age not earlier than the division of Alexander's empire by the Diadochi."⁷ Eissfeldt is willing to allow some of the material of chaps. 1–6 to stem from the Persian era: "Since the narratives of i–vi take place at the Babylonian and Persian courts, and contain much that well reflects the conditions there, . . . the most likely assumption is that their material does go back to the Persian period."⁸ Although an occasional scholar may thus admit to a pre-Greek period, certainly any thought of a still earlier traditional date is usually out of the question.

The six midrashic folk tales in chs. 1–6, even in their written form, most likely antedate the vicious persecution of the Jews by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, and in oral form these stories may go back to the Persian period, though hardly to the seventh and sixth centuries B.C., the fictional dates given in the narratives. . . . But the opinion that these stories were written sometime in the third century B.C. seems highly probable.⁹

The present study will show, however, that based upon its literary genre the extreme position that views all of Daniel (including chaps. 1–6) as being written in the second century BC is manifestly in error.¹⁰ Further, it will demonstrate that arguments for a pre-Maccabean provenance for the first six chapters need not exclude the traditional dating in the late Babylonian or early Persian periods.¹¹

⁵ W. S. LaSor, D. A. Hubbard and F. W. Bush, *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 667. The authors go on to point out that "it is not unreasonable, then, to attribute the dreams and visions to Daniel, who passed them on (in written form or otherwise), and that they finally were put in canonical form in the fourth or third century."

⁶ Thus P. R. Davies ("Eschatology in the Book of Daniel," *JSOT* 17 [1980] 35) remarks: "We can be reasonably confident that the stories about Daniel and his friends in chs. 1–6 were in existence before the visions were composed. To begin with, the attitude to Gentiles and Gentile monarchs in particular hardly reflects a Maccabean context."

⁷ J. A. Montgomery, *The Book of Daniel* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1927) 96. See also J. A. Bewer, *The Literature of the Old Testament* (3d ed.; New York: Columbia University, 1962) 436; J. G. Gammie, "The Classification, Stages of Growth, and Changing Intentions in the Book of Daniel," *JBL* 95 (1976) 191–194; G. Hölscher, "Die Entstehung des Buches Daniel," *TSK* 92 (1919) 113–138.

⁸ O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament* (New York: Harper, 1965) 522. See also W. L. Humphreys ("A Life-Style for Diaspora: A Study of the Tales of Esther and Daniel," *JBL* 92 [1973] 211), who remarks: "At the foundations of the books of Esther and Daniel are tales of a particular type, which along with their considerable entertainment value, develop a particular theological emphasis addressed to the emerging Jewish communities of the Persian and hellenistic diaspora."

⁹ Hartman and Di Lella, *Daniel* 13.

¹⁰ Humphreys ("Life-Style" 221) observes: "If it is suggested that these tales originated in Jewish circles sympathetic to Antiochus IV Epiphanes, it is difficult to imagine how they could have then been linked with the material in Daniel 7–12."

¹¹ Collins ("Court-Tales" 220) admits that "the genre of the court-tale was widely known and . . . such tales could conceivably be composed as pure fictions anywhere."

II. DANIEL AMONG THE COURT TALES

1. *Daniel as a court tale.* Even a cursory glance at the first six chapters of Daniel is sufficient to note the similarity of these narratives to a number of stories regarding life at a foreign court. Termed generally "court tales,"¹² such stories deal with the exploits of a godly exile in a foreign court whose piety and wisdom enable him to emerge triumphantly from various tests and rise to personal prominence.¹³

Such narratives usually include such elements as (1) a specific test involving faith, morality, or compromise of covenantal standards, (2) the friendliness of a resident court official, (3) besting the foreigners in contests or conflict, and (4) an unexpected extraordinary resolution to a besetting problem. The narratives themselves characteristically fall into two subgroups: (1) the court contest, in which the hero provides the interpretation to a seemingly insoluble problem, and (2) the court conflict, in which the hero's purity is rewarded with deliverance.¹⁴

The book of Daniel contains the fullest and best-known collection of court narratives. Both subtypes are well represented, and all four of the key elements mentioned above may be found to some degree within them. Thus chaps. 2, 4–5 belong to the court-contest subgroup. The accounts display common features such as the inability of the king or his court to interpret the material in question (2:1–11; 4:4–7; 5:5–9) whereas Daniel can supply the interpretation (2:27–45; 4:19–27; 5:27–28) and in two cases (2:48–49; 5:29) is elevated because of his prowess. Moreover in two other instances (2:46–47; 4:34–35) the king praises God, and the words of the rewarded servant prove to be a prophecy that is subsequently fulfilled.¹⁵

¹² See *ibid.* 218–220; Humphreys, "Life-Style" 211–217; M. Delcor, *Le Livre de Daniel* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1971) 23–25; A. Lacoque, *The Book of Daniel* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1978) 1. S. Niditch and R. Duran ("The Success Story of the Wise Courtier: A Formal Approach," *JBL* 96 [1977] 179–193) further classify Daniel 2 as a folktale of a particular sort—one that deals with a hero's wisdom.

¹³ Perhaps the label "court narrative" should be proposed for these stories, a term that could avoid some of the more extreme classifications such as the suggestion *Märchen* put forward by H. P. Müller, "Märchen, Legende und Enderwartung: Zum Verständnis des Buches Daniel," *VT* 26 (1976) 338–350, a proposal drawn from the fantasy world, or that of R. M. Hals, "Legend: A Case Study in OT Form-Critical Terminology," *CBQ* 34 (1972) 173, an idea based on the wondrous realm of legend. J. J. Collins appears to have subsequently also been drawn to this category, proposing the term "court legend"; cf. *Daniel with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) 41–42. Still another suggestion focuses on the genre "short story"; cf. D. N. Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty* (Sheffield: Almond, 1988) 14–31, 163–164. Fewell applies a multifaceted literary-critical approach to the narratives in Daniel 1–6. P. R. Davies (*Daniel* [Sheffield: JSOT, 1985] 51–52) further divides Daniel 1–6 into interpretation stories (chaps. 2, 4–5) and deliverance stories (chaps. 3, 6); cf. also pp. 39–42. E. W. Heaton (*Daniel* [London: SCM, 1967] 37–41) calls the stories of Daniel 1–6 "popular romances." J. E. Goldingay (*Daniel* [WBC; Dallas: Word, 1989] 6) takes a composite approach: "The stories in Dan 1–6 combine features of midrash, court-tale, legend, and aretology."

¹⁴ In this I have followed the lead of Humphreys ("Life-Style" 217–220), whose twofold division is perhaps the simplest among the several suggestions put forward by scholars.

¹⁵ See further J. G. Gammie, "On the Intention and Sources of Daniel I–VI," *VT* 31 (1981) 281–292. Gammie (p. 283) calls particular attention to "the extremely important element of 'prophecy fulfilled' . . . in chapters IV and V." Particularly representative is Daniel's interpretation of the handwriting on the wall (Dan 5:25–31). Not only did Daniel properly compute the seemingly

Common elements are likewise present in the court-conflict narratives (chaps. 3, 6). In both an accusation of treasonable disloyalty is made against the hero(es) (3:8–12; 6:10–15) that results in personal danger (3:13–23; 6:16–17) from which divinely initiated deliverance is secured (3:24–27; 6:19–23). In both cases some of those who laid hands on the hero(es) were killed (3:19–23; 6:24), God is praised (3:28–29; 6:25–27), and the hero(es) is/are elevated (3:30; 6:30).

Chapter 1 (which serves to introduce the Aramaic narratives of chaps. 2–6), while comprised of somewhat different elements, can also be termed a court contest. A test that involves personal danger for the heroes is proposed (vv. 8–13). The test results in vindication for the heroes (vv. 14–16), for which they are rewarded by God (v. 17) and recognized by men (vv. 18–20).

Taking all six chapters into account, we may observe the following common elements: an opening setting (1:1–7; 2:1–3; 3:1–7; 4:1–3; 5:1–6; 6:1–3); a crisis develops (1:8–13; 2:4–24; 3:8–23; 4:4–18; 5:7–16; 6:2–14); the hero(es) prove(s) equal to it (1:14–16; 2:25–45; 3:24–29; 4:19–27; 5:17–28; 6:15–27); he/they is/are promoted (1:17–20; 2:46–49; 3:30; 5:29; 6:28). Thus a fairly consistent picture of what constitutes a court narrative emerges. The question remains concerning how the book of Daniel compares with other examples of tales of life in a foreign court as to material represented and their date and setting.

2. *Other court tales.* Perhaps the oldest narrative concerning life in a foreign court is the Tale of Sinuhe, dating from Egypt's Middle Kingdom era (2040–1786 BC).¹⁶ The story concerns a certain attendant in the service of the wife of Sesostri I (1991–1962 BC). When news reaches Sesostri of his father's sudden death while Sesostri is away on a Libyan campaign, Sinuhe flees into the highlands of Syro-Palestine.¹⁷ Received by a kindly Asiatic (Amorite?) chieftain (Ammunenshi) who knows of Sinuhe's prowess, Sinuhe eventually marries the chief's daughter, settles down, and fares well, even serving in an administrative post.

A great test comes for Sinuhe when a local hero, a Goliath type, challenges the exiled Egyptian David to mortal combat. Calling on his skill from years of training and service in the Egyptian royal house, Sinuhe dis-

insoluble mathematical puzzle (the sum of the letters was doubtless 62; cf. v. 31), but also each of the cuneiform signs was translated into Aramaic where related homophonic verbs were brought into play. The solution to the riddle indicated the imminent demise of Belshazzar's kingdom, an event that followed "that very night." As for the identity of "Darius the Mede" see J. Baldwin, *Daniel* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1978) 23–28; D. J. Wiseman, "Some Historical Problems in the Book of Daniel," *Notes on Some Problems in the Book of Daniel* (London: Tyndale, 1965) 9–18.

¹⁶ For translation and analysis of the story itself see M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (Berkeley: University of California, 1973) 1.222–235.

¹⁷ On the basis of the didactic piece, "The Instruction of King Amenemhet," it is generally believed that Amenemhet was assassinated and that Sinuhe, though innocent, feared being implicated with the conspirators; cf. J. A. Wilson, *The Culture of Ancient Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1951) 134–136.

patches the bully, slaying him with his own battle-ax.¹⁸ He praises the proper god (Mont) and is embraced by his chieftain father-in-law. Afterward he grows rich and settles down to live in peace until a ripe old age.¹⁹

It can readily be seen that the Tale of Sinuhe contains many elements of the traditional court-conflict tale. Like Daniel (1:18–20), Sinuhe has initial success at the court. Sinuhe too (cf. Dan 3:8–23; 6:12–16) faces a life-threatening conflict in which he is victorious, followed by even further prominence and success (cf. Dan 3:30; 6:28).

A narrative that is nearly contemporary in setting is the Biblical story of Joseph (Genesis 37–50).²⁰ Particularly appropriate for the study of the court tale is the material in Genesis 41. The narrative has its setting in Pharaoh's dreams concerning two groups of seven cows, one good and the other bad (vv. 1–7). When Pharaoh's counselors are not able to interpret the dreams (v. 8), his cupbearer (who up to this point has forgotten the Joseph who had interpreted correctly his dreams while in prison) remembers Joseph and recommends him to the king (vv. 9–13). Joseph is brought, interprets the dreams (vv. 14–36), and is elevated to high office in Pharaoh's service (vv. 37–45).²¹ Attestation of the correctness of Joseph's interpretation follows in due course as the predicted years of plenty are succeeded by the seven years of famine (vv. 46–57).

Once again we have a narrative that shows several points of comparison with the court tales in the book of Daniel, in this case a tale of court contest. Common elements include the availability of a friend at court for the hero (cf. vv. 9–13 with Dan 1:9), the inability of the king's counselors to interpret the dreams as opposed to the hero's ability (cf. vv. 8, 14–36 with Dan 1:17; 2:18–19; 4:6, 15 with Dan 5:8, 13–29), and the promotion of God's servant after successfully interpreting the dream (cf. vv. 37–45 with Dan 2:48; 5:29 with Dan 3:30).²²

¹⁸ Upon dispatching his enemy and plundering his positions, Sinuhe applies the golden rule in reverse: "What he had meant to do to me, I did to him"; cf. K. Sethe, *Ägyptische Lesestücke* (Leipzig, 1924), plate 9, lines 14–15.

¹⁹ The story goes on to relate how in advanced age Sinuhe longed for home, was well received by Sesostris and the Egyptian court, and lived out his final years in prosperity, happiness and security in his native land. W. Lee Humphreys (*Joseph and His Family* [Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1988] 155–158) likewise calls attention to a literary connection between the Biblical story of Joseph and that of the Egyptian Tale of Sinuhe. Focusing more closely on Sinuhe's relation to Pharaoh's court he classifies the Egyptian tale (as well as the Biblical stories concerning Joseph, Daniel and Esther) as a courtier story. Such stories "are all set in some fashion in royal establishments that deal with the adventures of a courtier as hero or heroine" (p. 10). It seems best, however, to distinguish stories of a general nature regarding life and adventures at a domestic court from tales of life at a foreign court. The latter is the focus of the present study. It may be noted that the Tale of Sinuhe contains even better parallels with "court tales" than with "courtier stories."

²⁰ J. R. Battenfield ("A Consideration of the Identity of the Pharaoh of Genesis 47," *JETS* 15 [1972] 77–85) makes a good case for the setting of the Joseph narratives in the days of Sesostris III (1878–1842 BC).

²¹ On Joseph's high position at the Egyptian court see W. A. Ward, "Egyptian Titles in Genesis 39–50," *BSac* 114 (1957) 40–59.

²² Some further points of comparison may be drawn between the wider Joseph material and the Daniel corpus: (1) the hero's handsome appearance (Gen 39:6; Dan 1:4); (2) the hero's

Another extra-Biblical tale often associated with this genre is the seventh/sixth-century Story of Ahiqar.²³ Unfortunately, while most of the wise counsel of Ahiqar remains, the plot line of the story is poorly preserved. What can be discerned concerns an old royal advisor (Ahiqar) who, having groomed his nephew as his successor, finds that the nephew returns his kindness with evil, so much so that he is forced to flee. Ultimately, however, when a difficult time arises the Assyrian king (Esarhaddon) remembers that Ahiqar had saved his life and restores and elevates him, while the nephew is given his due. Although the story is fragmentary, enough can be discerned to see that the usual elements of court contest are present: the hero's initial success, a contest that threatens his life, his eventual exaltation together with the punishment of his adversary.

Traditionally dated to the fifth century BC, the Biblical book of Esther deals with court conflict. While Esther faces a real challenge and even possible death in counteracting the scheme of the wicked Haman, in a distinctive sense the primary contest is between Haman and Mordecai. It is Mordecai who, because he refuses to bow down to Haman, incurs Haman's wrath (3:4–5) and faces possible death together with all the Jews (3:9). Through the help of Esther the queen (and his cousin/foster daughter; 2:7) Mordecai succeeds in turning the tables on Haman. Haman gets his just deserts, being hung on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai (7:9–10). The Jews are delivered (8:8–14; 9:1–17), and Mordecai is exalted in Haman's place (8:15–17; 10:2–3).

Several points of contact between Esther and other court narratives are observable. Thus Mordecai (as well as Esther; 2:7–9, 17–18) enjoys good standing before the time of crisis comes (3:5–6, 10–15). In the process of overcoming the crisis, familiar details take place such as the king's sleeplessness (6:1; cf. Dan 2:1; 4:4–5; 6:18), just retribution upon the hero's enemies (7:9–10), and the elevation of the hero (8:8; 10:3).²⁴

Key elements of the court tale have also been noted in several other narratives. Thus because the fifth-century-BC Nehemiah stands in a favored position in the Persian court he is able to meet the crisis of the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem (Neh 1:1–2:9). The second-century Story of the Three Guardsmen, found in 1 Esdr 3:1–4:63, may also be noted. The story features a contest between three of King Darius' bodyguards as to who could answer the question "Which one thing is strongest?" (3:4–5).²⁵ Darius, in the presence of his officials, judges Zerubbabel's answer—"Women

surpassing wisdom (Gen 41:39; Dan 1:20) and personal purity (Gen 39:9; Dan 1:8); (3) initial prosperity (Gen 39:1–6; Dan 3:12; 6:1–4) followed by a conspiracy against the hero (Gen 39:13–18; Dan 3:8–12; 6:5–14) that results in his condemnation (Gen 39:20; Dan 3:19–20; 6:12); (4) after the contest/conflict, the honoring of God by a foreign ruler (Gen 41:38–39; Dan 2:47; 3:29; 4:37; 6:25–27).

²³ Ahiqar also figures in the second-century story of Tobit, where he serves as cupbearer to the Assyrian King Shalmaneser.

²⁴ It may be added that the important element of a friendly court official is also present, albeit applied to the situation of Esther (2:15–18).

²⁵ Josephus *Ant.* 11.3.2 suggests that the king himself proposed the contest.

are strongest, but truth is victor over all things"—to be wisest and offers him great reward. Zerubbabel asks only that the king keep his promise to rebuild Jerusalem and its temple, a request that the king freely grants. Accordingly Zerubbabel is commissioned with the task of returning to Jerusalem to see to the work. For this Zerubbabel praises God, the author of true wisdom.

Once again one may note familiar motifs. The story is set in a foreign court, the hero is blessed with divine wisdom, bests others in a contest at court, is rewarded, and praises God for his success. Like the account in Nehemiah, the hero is concerned with desperate conditions in the beloved city of Jerusalem and succeeds through his piety and godly wisdom in persuading a foreign king to order its rebuilding. Unlike the sober account in the canonical Nehemiah (and Ezra), however, the story lacks both historical credibility (e.g. wrong Persian king) and touch with reality (e.g. the test itself and the fanciful *carte blanche* reward of the king; 4:42).

In the second-century story of Tobit, the death of King Shalmaneser of Assyria brings about a reversal of Tobit's good standing at court. The pious Tobit had been guilty of mercy toward the Jews. Much like Ahiqar he is forced to abide in obscurity until the time when Sennacherib is assassinated and Esarhaddon ascends to the throne. Then his nephew (here identified as Ahiqar) becomes cupbearer to the king. At this point Tobit is sufficiently restored to favor to be allowed to return safely to his home in Nineveh. Thereafter the story is concerned with Tobit's son Tobiah's quest for a cure for his father's sudden blindness, during which (with the help of the angel Raphael) he frees a maiden from the clutches of a demon, marries her, and returns home with a remedy to cure his father. In his old age Tobit predicts the demise of Assyria and Nineveh, a prophecy that Tobiah, who had fled to Media, later learns did come to pass.

Other than the elements of personal success at a foreign court and a prophecy of the coming destruction of a world power, there is little to place the story of Tobit within the genre of the court tale. It perhaps may better be termed a religious romance.²⁶

Much the same may be said for the second-century story of Judith, often put forward as an example of a court tale. The plot centers on a lovely, godly and wise Jewish woman, who uses her beauty to gain the attention of Holofernes, the commander of the Assyrian army that is besieging the town of Bethulia. Having beguiled him into a midnight rendezvous in his tent, she succeeds in decapitating the drunken Assyrian. She subsequently makes her way safely to Bethulia, where the severed head is hung on the battlements of the city wall. The grisly deed brings courage to the Jewish defenders but causes such fear and confusion among the Assyrian attackers that they are easily routed before the Israelites. Thus the city is delivered by the heroic deed of a pious Jewess.

²⁶ So M. F. Unger, *Introductory Guide to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1951) pp. 90-91; see also Hartman and Di Lella, *Daniel* 61.

It is evident that, as in the case of Tobit, the story of Judith is not really a tale of life in a foreign court. Rather, it is narrative fiction designed to stir beleaguered Jewish believers to faithfulness to Torah, to national pride, and to courage in the face of great external opposition. Although it may yield glimpses of features found in stories set in a foreign court, such as the essential piety (Jdt 8:6; cf. Gen 39:8–10; Dan 1:8), wisdom (Jdt 8:28–29; cf. Gen 41:39; Dan 1:17–20; 4:18; 5:11–12) and fine appearance of the central character (Jdt 8:7; 10:14; cf. Gen 39:6; Dan 1:4), these are scarcely sufficient to categorize Judith as a court tale.

One further tale that may be included is the story of Bel and the Dragon (late second century BC). The story falls into three parts. In the first part Daniel, a wise and godly Jew living in Babylon and a “companion of the King (Cyrus),” becomes engaged in a contest as to the greatness of the god Bel. Daniel exposes the false claims of the priests of Bel as to their god’s voracious nocturnal appetite. After ashes have been scattered on the floor of the temple of Bel at night, the footprints of the priests and their family, who really ate the food, are clearly visible by morning’s light. The duped king, now edified, has the wicked priests and their families killed.

In the second part of the story Daniel again dispatches a pagan god, this time blowing up a great serpent that the Babylonians worshiped. For this the Babylonians persuade the king to throw Daniel into a den of lions. In the third part the prophet Habakkuk is carried by the angel of the Lord to Babylon to cater in Daniel’s dinner in the midst of the lions. When on the seventh day the king comes to mourn for Daniel he finds him alive, praises Daniel’s God, and has his accusers put to death.

Here again one may see elements of the court narrative at work. Daniel is both pious and wise; he has an initial prominence with the king; he falls into both contest and conflict for his faith; he is delivered; his enemies are killed. The dependence of the final phase of the story on the canonical Daniel is of course obvious.

III. LOCATING DANIEL AMONG THE COURT TALES

Having surveyed numerous examples of court tales from the nineteenth to the late second century BC, we note several facts. The genre is a well-established one, stretching across the entire span of the first and second millennia BC. The presence of the genre over such an expanse of time would suggest that dogmatic attempts to place the origin of the Daniel corpus in the second century BC are ill-founded. No particular century is demanded by the genre *per se*.

Quite the contrary, there is much to suggest that the court tales of Daniel antedate the Maccabean crisis of the second century, as conceded by the majority of contemporary scholars. The first six chapters have often been ably defended as to their historicity.²⁷ Careful linguistic analysis has

²⁷ Cf. e.g. R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) 1112–1123; H. Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1979) 561–566;

also demonstrated that Daniel's Aramaic and Hebrew clearly antedate the state of the languages in the second century.²⁸ It may be further observed that Daniel's literary affinities within the field of ancient Near Eastern literature have often been explored, with similar results. Thus J. Baldwin, having compared the dream material of Daniel (e.g. chap. 2) with the second-century dream visions of the book of Enoch (chaps. 85–90), remarks:

By comparison with the Book of Dreams, which comes from the date alleged to be that of the writing of Daniel, Daniel shows every sign of coming from an earlier period. . . . In view of the fact that the book of Daniel claims to come from the sixth century B.C., the possibility should be granted that it originated during that century in Babylon, and the evidence further explored.²⁹

Our study of the genre of the court tale reaches much the same result. Certainly Daniel's court tales bear little resemblance in genre to the second-century stories of Tobit or Judith. If details in *Bel and the Dragon* remind one of the book of Daniel it is because they are based on Daniel. Their obvious dependence in a time period nearly contemporaneous with the proposed critical date for the canonical Daniel seems difficult to accept. Pseudepigraphal writers characteristically depended on heroes and stories drawn from a distinctively earlier era. It would appear that there was insufficient time for the book of Daniel to be edited and accepted by the Jewish community so as to be imitated in pseudepigraphal fiction, as the critical view demands. Illustrative of this process is the second-century *Story of the Three Guardsmen*, clearly based on the fifth-century books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

The court tales in Daniel therefore bear little resemblance to the other literary pieces commonly associated with the genre. This observation reinforces that of E. W. Humphreys:

As a series of tales these would not, in and of themselves, be at home in Palestine in the crisis of the period of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, and it is difficult to understand how they could have been created at that period when the line between things Jewish and things pagan was being so sharply drawn.³⁰

Accordingly one must look to an earlier time for the dating of the material. But how much earlier? As noted above, most scholars decide for a third-century-BC Greek provenance, while a few opt for the late Persian period and still fewer for the neo-Babylonian/early-Persian era.

R. D. Wilson, *Studies in the Book of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972); D. J. Wiseman, "Problems" 9–18.

²⁸ Cf. e.g. G. L. Archer, Jr., "The Aramaic of the 'Genesis Apocryphon' Compared with the Aramaic of Daniel," *New Perspectives on the Old Testament* (ed. J. B. Payne; Waco: Word, 1970) 160–169; "The Hebrew of Daniel Compared with the Qumran Sectarian Documents," *The Law and the Prophets* (ed. J. H. Skilton; Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974) 470–481; K. A. Kitchen, "The Aramaic of Daniel," *Notes on Some Problems in the Book of Daniel* (London: Tyndale, 1965) 31–79; E. M. Yamauchi, "The Greek Words in Daniel in the Light of Greek Influence in the Near East," *New Perspectives* 170–200.

²⁹ Cf. e.g. J. Baldwin, "Some Literary Affinities of the Book of Daniel," *TynBul* 30 (1979) 77–99.

³⁰ Humphreys, "Life-Style" 221.

Some light may be cast on the problem by noting that while both court-contest and court-conflict types are known as early as the early second millennium BC, in every case up through the first half of the first millennium the contest/conflict is an individual one revolving around personal success in a foreign court. In no case is there hostility toward the foreign power, nor is there suggestion of national/ethnic oppression and hence the need for deliverance of the hero's people. As Humphreys points out:

It is within these foreign courts that the heroes move, and the possibility of a life, rewarding and creative, in this setting is affirmed. . . . Such a life is not without pitfalls and dangers, but one can meet these and still remain a loyal Jew and devotee of his deity. . . . For in these tales the possibilities of life in contact and interaction with things foreign is affirmed. There has been no polarization of the situation.³¹

Beginning with the book of Esther, however, matters change. The Jewishness of the hero/heroine involves the welfare of the whole nation. Mordecai's projected demise involves imminent danger for all his people. The role of Nehemiah to the king is one that brings the welfare of his people into view. And the later stories of the Three Guardsmen, Tobit and Judith all involve at some point the needs of Jewish communities, whether for survival, deliverance, or vengeance upon their enemies. If Bel and the Dragon appears to contradict this observation, it may be accounted for by remembering that its tales are directly indebted to the canonical book of Daniel.

If, then, concern regarding the welfare of the Jewish people constitutes a new feature to the centuries-old court-tale motif, it may well be that its *raison d'être* lies in the details relative to the return of the Jews and the subsequent opposition and persecution they faced in their own land. The fifth century BC may thus well mark the time when the court tales took on a new dimension. Since the court tales of Daniel do not reflect this new feature, one must look beyond the more commonly suggested Hellenistic or late Persian periods for their origin. Baldwin's conclusion appears to be substantiated: "The late Neo-Babylonian or early Persian period best accounts for the exact information about the Babylonian empire . . . preserved in these stories."³² The cumulative effect of the historical, linguistic and literary data suggests that the traditional Biblical setting for the book of Daniel may prove to be correct after all. Perhaps one avenue of success in the quest for the historical Daniel may lie in holding on to his court tales.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Baldwin, *Daniel* 37.