Daniel and Contacts Between the Aegean and the Near East Before Alexander

Edwin M. Yamauchi

As expressed long ago in S. R. Driver’s classic statement, the Greek loanwords in the Aramaic of Daniel have been regarded as objective proof for the late date of Daniel. As restated by Coxon, “Of all the linguistic arguments which have been used in the debate concerning the age of the Aramaic sections of Daniel and the date of the composition of the book, the Greek loans seem to provide the strongest evidence in favour of the second century BC.”

Such recent commentaries as the Anchor Bible volume on Daniel list K. A. Kitchen’s important study of the Aramaic of Daniel but continue to repeat the critical position: “The Greek names for the musical instruments in 3:5 probably do not antedate the reign of Alexander the Great (336-323 BC).” It is therefore worthwhile to review some of the recent evidence of early contacts between the Aegean and the Near East.

Rowley in his review of Kitchen’s work had still maintained that the evidence of these Greek words was proof of the late date of Daniel’s Aramaic, but Kutscher was persuaded that such musical terms could have been borrowed from the Greek of Ionia or the islands prior to Alexander. Coxon points out that the form of gaytrōs indicates that the word was borrowed from Ionic kitharis rather than Attic kithara.

1. Syria and Palestine

As I have noted in my earlier studies, after isolated contacts between the

[p.38]

Aegean and the Near East in the Middle Bronze period, extensive trade developed in the Late Bronze age. The distribution of Mycenaean pottery in the Levant has been catalogued by Hankey.

---

5 Coxon, p.31.
After the disruption of the Dorian invasion and the dislocation of the Sea Peoples c.1200 BC, the Aegean entered a Dark Age which saw a great diminution if not a complete cessation of trade. From the early part of this era a Protogeometric hydria (11th-10th cent. BC) was discovered at Shiqmona near Mount Carmel in 1970.9

In an important study which surveys Greek imported ware along the Levant, Riis notes the extensive importation of Protogeometric cups (9th cent. BC) at many sites along the coast such as Sukas, Abu Hawam, Askalon, at inland sites such as Tayinat, Hama, and even into Mesopotamia in the Habur Valley, Halaf, and Nineveh.10 Riis dates the renewed influx of Greeks into the Near East from about 850 BC on the following data:

I may recapitulate that Tall Ābū Hawām III, Megiddo IV, and Samaria V were the earliest strata to yield Greek Geometric ware, but that there is no unanimity about the dates of these deposits. Nevertheless it seems beyond doubt that Tall Ābū Hawām III belongs to a time before about 815 BC, Megiddo IV to one before about 750 BC and Samaria V before about 735 BC, and the lowest proposed beginnings of the said strata are about 980, 850, and 750 BC respectively.11

Though Greeks were in the area by the 9th cent., it was only c.675 BC that a Greek temple was built at Sukas. The first Greek inscription comes from a still later stratum—“a spindle-whorl of local clay, but of a Greek 8th-6th century type was inscribed about 600 BC in a Greek dialect and in Greek characters betraying an Insular origin of the owner…”12

From Palestine itself excavations, particularly along the coast, have added year by year to the list of imported Greek ware, particularly from the 7th through the 5th cent. BC. In the 7th and 6th cent. it was primarily Eastern Greek (Ionian) and Cypriote ware; from the 5th cent. it was primarily a matter of Attic ware from Athens.13

Greek ware of the 7th cent. was recovered by M. Dothan at Ashdod.14 More recently in the remains of a 7th-cent. Assyrian palace at Shari’a, 10 miles NW of Beersheba, excavators have found Greek wine amphorae, a Corinthian aryballos, and the head of a Greek figurine.15

---

11 Ibid., p.162.
12 Ibid., p.158.
Greek pottery of the 6th-5th cent. has been discovered at the following sites within the last decade:

Akko. East Greek pottery, a rare Attic red-figured bell krater, Greek amphorae, etc.¹⁶

Ashdod: “Many sherd s of Greek red-and-black painted ware, including one with what appears to be a Homeric scene.”¹⁷

Shari’a: glazed Attic ware, red-figured lekythos, bronze fibulae of the Greek type.¹⁸

Tell Gamma: numerous Attic red-figure ware.¹⁹

Tel Megadim: an abundance of Attic and Cypriote wares.²⁰

Tell Qedesh: a large quantity of Attic pottery including black-figure, red-figure, and black glazed wares.²¹

Yoqne’am: Attic and Cypriote wares.²²

Ephraim Stern, who has written a dissertation summarizing the archaeological evidence of the Persian period (in Hebrew with an English summary), states: “This leads to the conclusion that the Greek cultural conquest preceded the Greek political conquest in Palestine by many years.”²³ In a later article summarizing his findings, Stern concluded:

[p.40]

“This fits the picture of life in the area as portrayed both by the sources and by the archaeological finds, namely of expanding Greek trade at the end of the 8th century and mainly in the 7th century...”²⁴

2. IONIAN/YAWAN/YAMAN

The archaeological data supports the textual evidence that Ionian Greeks penetrated not only the Syro-Palestinian coast but the interior regions of the Near East well before 500 BC.

The Hebrew word for the Greeks, Yavan or Javan (IT Javarrm) is derived from the Greek Ἰωνεία = Ἰάκων (cf. Linear B. 1-ya-wo-ne), as the first contacts were with the Greeks from the settlements of Ionia on the western coast of Turkey.²⁵

---

¹⁷ Christian News from Israel 20.3-4 (1968): 42.
The word appears in the Table of Nations (Gen. 10:4), where the sons of Javan are listed, according to the NIV, as: Elishah, Tarshish, the Kittim and the Rodanim.

Elishah is the same as the name Alashiya found in Egyptian, Hittite, and Ugaritic texts. Most scholars identify the site as Cyprus.26

Tarshish is based on a Phoenician word which means “smeltery,” and was the name of many sites, including Tartessus in far-off Spain.27 In this context, it no doubt means Tarsus in Cilicia, the home of Paul.

The word Kittim is derived from Kition, a Mycenaean settlement on Cyprus.28 In the Old Testament it is used of the Greeks as also in the Arad ostraca.29 In the Dead Sea Scrolls, however, the term has come to mean the Romans.30

Ezek. 27:13 speaks of Tyre’s trade with Greece (Javan). The Hebrews are accused of selling their kinsmen as slaves to the Greeks (Javanim) in Joel 3:6 (Heb. 4:6), a work which has been shown to be pre-exilic in date.32

29 NPOT, p.187.
A related form of the word Yavan also appears in cuneiform texts from the time of Sargon II (722-705 BC):

- **Akkadian** Yaman
- **Old Persian** Yaunā
- **Elamite** Yauna.\(^{33}\)

### 3. THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE

One might well concede contacts between the Aegean and the Levant, but question whether Greek objects and words could have penetrated into Mesopotamia. The archaeological and the textual data demonstrate that Aegean influence did penetrate the interior at an early date. In addition to the evidence which I have already collected,\(^{34}\) I might note the following:

The German excavators found at Babylon in the area of Merkes cremation burials, which they ascribe to Greeks. These were found in the levels before the destruction of the city by Sennacherib, that is, in the very early 7th cent. BC.\(^{35}\)

Sennacherib describes in an octagonal prism dated to 694 BC his defeat of the Ionians of Cilicia.\(^{36}\) According to King:

> The deportation of considerable bodies of these (Ionian) men to Nineveh, where they were employed upon the royal palace then in course of construction, may well have had important effects, in certain directions, on contemporary Assyrian work.\(^{37}\)

King suggests that this may help to explain the statement in Abydenus that Sennacherib “erected a temple of the Athenians.” Commenting on small buildings built by Sargon and Ashurbanipal, King observes: “But the columns, their most striking feature, furnished with bases and voluted capitals, quite give an impression of proto-Ionic work.”\(^{38}\) Sennacherib also used some of the Ionians as mercenaries in his army.

At the Aegean end of the trade route, some Assyrian glazed pottery has been found in recent excavations at Sardis in Lydia, an area just to the east of Ionia.\(^{39}\)

### 4. THE NEO-BABYLONIAN EMPIRE

\(^{33}\) W. Röllig, “Griechische Eigennamen in Texten der babylonischen Spätzeit,” *Orientalia* 29 (1960): 383. In the Persian Empire *Yaunā* was a designation for Greeks, especially those of the VIIth satrapy which included the west and south coasts of Anatolia. See Riis, p.133.

\(^{34}\) *GB*, pp.61-63; *NPOT*, p.186.


\(^{36}\) *GB*, p.63.


\(^{38}\) Ibid., p.334.

We have evidence also of contacts between Lydia and the Neo-Babylonian Empire. At Sardis were found Neo-Babylonian seals. In Babylon itself the famous ration tablets published by Weidner list in addition to Jews and Egyptians, four Lydian names.

The throne room of Nebuchadnezzar at Babylon betrays Greek influence. Seton Lloyd comments: “A tall panel recovered from a wall outside the throne-room is of special interest, in that classical motifs are adapted to the design, suggesting that some contact now existed between Babylon and Greece.”

Oppenheim has published two Neo-Babylonian texts from Uruk (YOS 6.168 and TCL 12.84) which detail trade between Mesopotamia and Greek centres (Yamana) in copper and iron.

Greek pottery is represented in Babylonia at the earliest by one Mycenaean sherd. After a gap during the Greek Dark Ages, imports began again with red-figure ware (after 530 BC), with most of the pieces coming from the 4th cent. Sherds were found in the homes, the palace, and temples. Among two fine painted pieces were those by the painter Sotades (fl. 460-450 BC).

5. THE PERSIAN EMPIRE

According to Dan. 5, Daniel himself witnessed the overthrow of Babylon, by Cyrus in 539 BC. First-hand Persian contact with the Ionian Greeks had come some time before with the conquest by Cyrus of Lydia and of Ionia in 547/546.

At his new capital at Pasargadae Cyrus employed Ionian craftsmen. Carl Nylander has fully examined the evidence of Ionian stone masons at Pasargadae.

The Achaemenid kings also used the ancient Elamite capital of Susa, which was the setting for the drama of Esther. Darius’ famous building inscription, describing the erection of his

40 Ibid.
42 GB, pp.14, 68-69.
45 NPOT pp. 180, 196, n.79.
46 Schmidt, p.794.
48 GB, pp.72-84; NPOT, pp.188-92.
51 Yamauchi, “The Achaemenid Capitals,” pp.5-14. The so-called “Tomb of Daniel” is a mosque, which was observed by Benjamin of Tudela (12th cent.). Its foundation may go back to the 8th or the 7th cent. AD. See S. Matheson, Persia: An Archaeological Guide (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), pp. 150-51.

Palace at Susa, explicitly names Ionian workmen. 52 Some Greek ware has been found at Susa. 53

It is especially from the new capital of Darius I at Persepolis that we have clearly dated evidence for the presence of Greeks. 54 The Treasury Tablets, dated 492 to 458 BC, list among the *kurtash* workers: 55 Egyptians, 313 Syrians, and 201 Syrian, Egyptian, and Ionian workers. 55 Two of the Greek stone masons inscribed their names, Pytarchos and Nychon. 56

The earlier Elamite Fortification Tablets are dated from 509 to 494 BC. Among the names is one *Yaunaparza*, which Gershevitch analyses as *yauna-b(a)rja* “He who welcomes Greeks.” 57 Hallock notes that there is even one tablet (Fort. 1771) written in Greek: OINOS DUO MARIS TEBET “Two marrish of wine. Tebet.” 58 He further observes:

PF 1224 mentions Ionian mothers at Persepolis, nine of whom bore boys and received each 2 quarts of grain, while fourteen bore girls and received each 1 quart. A coin bearing the Athenian owl is impressed, in lieu of a stamp seal on PF 2053. Ionian works appear at Persepolis in PT 15, and at Susa, working on the royal palace, in Dsf29 and 42. 59

In the foundation of the Apadana, built between 517 and 514, were found four Lydian gold and four Greek silver coins. 60

From the late Achaemenid period prior to the coming of Alexander, we have the names of 45 Greeks who served as ambassadors to the Persian court. 61

6. SEMITIC WORDS IN GREEK

The converse of Greek words in Semitic dialects is the phenomenon of Semitic words in Greek from centuries before Alexander’s conquests. 62 A symposium edited by Krause listed 40 Akkadian words in European languages, including six in Greek. 63 Emily Vermeule accepts Semitic, specifically Canaanite etymologies for the following Greek words:

---

56 Krefter, p.441.
59 Ibid.
60 Dandamayev, p.45.
62 GB, p.60.
In an important monograph Masson lists the following early Semitic loans in Greek, in addition to those already mentioned:

- βύσσος: fine linen
- σάκκος: coarse cloth
- σινδόν: a garment
- γαυλός: milk jar
- κάδος: wine vessel
- κιννάμων: cinnamon
- κρόκος: crocus
- κύμινον: cummin
- δέλτος: writing tablet
- ἴσπις: jasper
- κάμηλος: camel, etc.

Most significant for our study are the following musical instruments listed by Masson as certain or probable loans:

- νάβλας: harp; cf. Hebrew נבה
- πανδόρα: lute
- σαμβύκη: small triangular harp; cf. Aramaic sabkā in Dan. 3.5
- τύμπανον: tambourine; cf. Hebrew 토되었

7. INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCES

Far more difficult to trace than pottery and coins, but of greater significance were the spiritual and intellectual contacts between the Aegean and the Near East. In this case, we have for various reasons more evidence in the west than in the east.

Some of the parallels, alleged for example by Cyrus H. Gordon, have

---

66 Ibid., pp.67-69.
67 Ibid., pp.90-91.
68 Ibid., pp.91-93.
69 Ibid., pp.94-95.
come under question. But though he may be proven to be mistaken in some details, surely Professor Gordon is correct in emphasizing the common background of Greek and Near Eastern cultures. With publication of more data, scholars like Walcot are beginning to realize the great debt that Greek religion owed to Semitic sources.

What may be demonstrated as a clear case of Near Eastern influence is the diffusion of the practice of cultic prostitution under the sponsorship of Ishtar/Astarte/Aphrodite through the mediation of the Phoenicians. In this case, we even have the artistic representations of the goddess to illustrate the transmission of the cult, namely Astarte plaques manufactured in Hamath. Riis observes:

The apparition at Corinth of such a piece and of a plaque which also seems Phoenician or Syrian is not at all astonishing, considering that the Corinthian pottery style began to be represented at Sükás in the later third of the 8th century BC, as also at Al-Minâ.

Similar Hamath ivories were found at the Dipylon cemetery at Athens from levels prior to 725 BC.

Less certain is the relation between the plague gods—Mesopotamian Nergal, Ugaritic Resheph, Canaanite Mekal, and Greek Apollo—recently proposed by Schretter.

Though we cannot uncritically accept all the stories which ascribed a Near Eastern inspiration for the various Greek philosophers of Ionia, a careful study of both the historical situation and of the respective texts of the west and of the east, convinces M. L. West that the traditions of such borrowing are sound in the case of the following 6th-cent. BC philosophers: Pherecydes, Anaximander, Anaximenes, and Heraclitus.

A specific case of borrowing may be seen in the discovery of the so-called Metonic calendar in Babylonia in 481 BC, soon before its publication in Athens in 432 BC.

---

75 Riis, p.170.
77 GB, p.85.
CONCLUSIONS

Nearly a decade ago at the end of a similar survey, I had written:

In conclusion, we may safely say that the presence of Greek words in an Old Testament book is not a proof of Hellenistic date, in view of the abundant opportunities for contacts between the Aegean and the Near East before Alexander. The evidence which I have presented is but a small fraction, which no doubt will be amplified many times by future discoveries.\(^{80}\)

I believe that this conclusion is irrefutable. Though current commentaries on Daniel continue to ignore the evidence, further archaeological evidence will, I predict, serve but to strengthen it. Hopefully future commentaries will come to recognize that the Greek words in Daniel cannot be used to date the book to the Hellenistic age.\(^{81}\)

---


Prepared for the Web in November 2006 by Robert I Bradshaw.

http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/

---

\(^{80}\) NPOT, p.192.

Bronze Age in the Aegean officially begins late in the fourth millennium BC, although metalworking is quite common before this, and regular use of tin bronze relatively rare before the later third millennium. Some have also stressed ecological differences between the northern and southern Aegean; the semi-arid, marginal environment of the southern Aegean stimulated social strategies. Kassianidou and Knapp (2004: 220) point out that, although there are copper minerals at Laurion, there is no archaeological evidence for copper extraction in the second millennium BC; the evidence depends on lead isotope analysis of artifacts. Before the first World War, Near East referred to the Balkans and the Ottoman empire, and the Middle East referred to Afghanistan, Iran, Turkestan, Central Asia, and Caucasus. After the Ottoman Empire disappeared in 1918, the area called the Near East was not used, and the Middle East came to be used for the entire region. Near East has referred to the countries in Western Asia that lie between Iran and the Mediterranean Sea. Middle East is referring to the region that includes North Africa and Western Asia. Middle East was a term that was coined in 1902 by Alfred Thayer Mahan. The term was