



## DARIUS II. DARIUS THE MEDE

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In the Old Testament Book of Daniel Darius the Mede is mentioned (5:30-31) as ruler after the slaying of the “Chaldean king” Belshazzar. Daniel is supposed to have flourished during the reigns of Darius and of Cyrus “king of Persia” (Daniel 6.28, 10.1), to be identified with Cyrus the Great (see [CYRUS iii](#); 529-29 B.C.E.). According to the narrative in its present form, Darius, identified as the son of [Ahasuerus](#) (Xerxes), a descendant of the Medes, was about sixty-two years old at his succession (Daniel 5:31, 9:1). These references, which do not conform to what is known of the history of the period, have caused problems for scholars trying to unravel the discrepancies in the text, a work of the Hellenistic period, long after the fall of the Achaemenids (see [DĀNĪĀL-E NABĪ i](#)).

The Book of Daniel is a collection of moralistic and religious stories, rather than a historical work, and, as such writings were popular among common folk, accuracy was not a prime characteristic. Many explanations of the discrepancies have been proposed by scholars (see listing in Rowley, p. 2), including the suggestion that different authors were involved in the composition of the book at different times. This explanation does not, however, account for the incorrect sequence in which the name of Darius the Mede precedes that of “Cyrus the Persian.” Other scholars have proposed that verse 6:28 should be interpreted as referring not to Darius and Cyrus but to



Darius as a throne name for Cyrus (Wiseman, p. 15); the age of sixty-two years would certainly fit with the facts known about the life of Cyrus. D. J. Wiseman (pp. 12-14) has suggested further that all the names of the Achaemenid kings were throne names, hence liable to confusion in the minds of subjects living far from the court. As the names of the Achaemenid kings were later lost, even in the Persian tradition, it is not surprising that in an area far from Persia the names and events of the Achaemenid period were reported incorrectly. Failure to recognize the distinction between Mede and Persian is, of course, found in other texts and was not unusual.

The confusion may thus be attributed to the popular nature of the Book of Daniel and its distance in time from the period of the early Achaemenid kings. The same confusion about Darius the Mede persisted in Arabic and Syriac sources (cf. Ṭabarī, I, pp. 647, 652-54, 665-68, 717; Bīrūnī, *Qānūn*, p. 154; idem, *Ātār*, p. 89; Bar Hebr̄šus, *Chronography*, ed. E. A. W. Budge, p. 31; cf. Yarshater, pp. 54-58).

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