A FEATURE OF THE DATES IN THE ARAMAIC PORTIONS OF EZRA AND DANIEL

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There are five dates in the Aramaic portions of Ezra and Daniel. They are:

- מֶֽלֶךְ־פָּרָֽסָּה (Ezra 4.24);
- בָבֶ֑לָה (Ezra 5.13);
- מַלְכָּ֗א (Ezra 6.3);
- מַלְכָּֽא (Ezra 6.15);
- בָּבֶ֔לְ (Dan. 7.1).

In each case, the year is expressed in the form שְׁנַת + a number + ל + either the king’s name or מַלְכוּת followed by the king’s name + a royal title.

The presence of the preposition ל in these dates has been relied on as an indication of the period in which the Aramaic portions of Ezra and Daniel were written. Rowley (1929: 103–104) states that ‘[t]he Preposition ל precedes the name of the King (or reign) in dates in Biblical Aramaic, Nabataean, and Sinaitic, but not in Babylonian, Lydian, or Egyptian Aramaic, save once in the last named. In Babylonian Aramaic, in addition to the form without Preposition, in agreement with that of the Papyri and of the Sardis inscription, we find a form with the Preposition ב.’ Thus, ‘with a single exception, the usage of the Papyri differs from that of Biblical Aramaic, and… the latter agrees with the later usage of the Nabataean inscriptions and the Targums. Moreover, the usage in Babylon in the fifth century B.C. is in disagreement with that of Biblical Aramaic.’ Rowley adds that ‘[i]t is curious… that the single occurrence of the later usage… in the Papyri occurs in what is probably the oldest text of the series’. This is TADAE B5.1, which was written in Egypt in 495 BCE. He emphasizes (p. 108) that this ‘was a rare exception in the age of the Papyri’. Charles (1929: lxxvi–lxxvii), like Rowley, refers to TADAE B5.1, but his point is not that the construction with ל is characteristic of one period rather than another, but that it is a distinctive feature shared by Ezra and Daniel which is attested only once in Egyptian Aramaic and not found in earlier Aramaic texts (in which, as it happens, no dates were known to him).
Boutflower ([1931]: 42–43), however, considers the ‘rare exception’ noted by Rowley a fatal weakness in his argument, and asks, ‘[i]f this usage occurs once in a papyrus of 495 B.C., may it not occur once, viz. in Dan. 7.1, in the Aramaic portion of a prophetic Book, seemingly written near the end of the reign of Cyrus?’ Both Kitchen (1965: 74–75, 78) and Coxon (1977: 113–115, 118, 122) cite texts from Egypt which were discovered after Rowley’s book was published, and on this basis Kitchen claims that ‘the preposition \( l \) before a king’s name in dates is a mark of \textit{early} date’. He also supposes, perhaps inconsistently, that ‘this item in the Aramaic of Daniel…is as likely to be an archaic survival as anything else, and to have found subsequent extension of use in a later day, in Nabataean and Targums’. If I have understood him correctly, Kitchen means by ‘an archaic survival’ that this is one of the items which ‘could be argued to be survivals till the second century BC’ (p. 79), since Imperial Aramaic is essentially homogeneous. Further considerations are advanced by Coxon, who believes ‘that Rowley is right in pointing to this construction as a piece of important evidence for dating the Aramaic of Daniel because the introductory formula to a king’s reign is likely to lie outside the style of a particular writer and reflect a particular stereotyped tradition current in the period to which he belonged’. He maintains, however, that ‘Rowley forces the evidence in asserting that the formula in Daniel fits best the period of the Targums’, since ‘the three early witnesses which contain \( \text{ב} \) suggest a familiarity of usage in the early period’, even though all scholars agree that this ‘was not the regular usage in the fifth century B.C.’ Coxon also thinks that the construction ‘may owe something to Hebrew practice,’ and he compares the dates in Hag. 1.1, which he says was composed in 520 BCE, and in Zech. 1.1. He adds, ‘[t]hat the construction is a common one in classical Hebrew is shown by its repeated occurrence in the historical books of the Old Testament’.

It will be claimed in this article that Coxon is right to hold that the construction with \( \text{ב} \) is indebted to Hebrew practice, but that it is more satisfactory to go beyond his position and identify it as a Hebraism. It will be argued that evidence from Imperial Aramaic texts is consistent with this conclusion.

In the Hebrew Bible there are ninety-three occasions on which ‘year x’ in dates is followed either by a king’s name (sixty-six times; 1 Kgs. 15.9, 25, 28, 33; 16.8, 10, 15, 23, 29; 22.41, 52; 2 Kgs. 1.17; 3.1; 8.16, 25; 9.29; 12.2; 13.1, 10; 14.1, 23; 15.1, 8, 13, 17, 23, 27, 30, 32; 16.1; 17.1, 6; 18.1, 9, 10[bis]; Jer. 1.3; 25.1[bis], 3; 32.1[bis]; 36.1, 9; 39.1, 2;