David and darics: reconsidering an anachronism in 1 Chronicles 29

Abstract: This note examines the use of the term “daric” in 1 Chr 29:7 for its ideological purposes, concluding that the anachronism was deployed purposely to signal resistance to imperial rule.

Keywords: Chronicles, Achaemenids, daric, imperialism

First Chronicles 29:7 reads: “They gave for the service of the House of God 5000 gold talents, 10 000 darics, 10 000 silver talents, 18 000 bronze talents, and 100 000 iron talents.”¹ The use of the word אדריכון, commonly translated as equivalent to the Greek word δαρεικός or “daric,” is a clear anachronism in the verse. The daric was a gold coin of the Achaemenid period, and thus unknown in the time of David. There are two ways to deal with the anachronism. One is to assume that the scribe-author did not realize the anachronism. This is unlikely, due to the distinctiveness of the coin. The other is to assume that the scribe-author did realize the anachronism. This is the approach I will take. Further to this approach is discerning the reasons for the deployment of the anachronism. I will outline some possibilities before settling on one as the most likely. In this argument, the deployment of the anachronism is a comment on monarchy: the monarchy of David, and obliquely the imperial rule of the Achaemenids and their governors in Persian-period Yehud.

The commentaries generally comment on the appearance of the term daric in 1 Chr 29:7 merely by pointing out the anachronism. They also often compare the

¹ All translations the author’s own.
occurrence here with the occurrences elsewhere in the biblical corpus. The term אדרכון appears here and in Ezr 8:27, while a similar term דרכמון appears in Ezr 2:69 and Neh 7:70-72. With G. Knoppers, I read אדרכון as δαρειός, daric; and דרכמון as δραχμή, drachma. Therefore there are only two occurrences of daric in the corpus, contrary to many of the lexica and concordances. However, even if all the occurrences of אדרכון and דרכמון are read as different spellings of the same word (daric), this does not affect my argument, as all the others are in texts set in the Persian period.

As to why the anachronism was deployed, a few commentators make no comment on the anachronism at all, not even on its appearance. Knoppers writes a long textual note on the term itself and the witness of the versions, where it is variously translated, but he ventures no opinion on why the term was used. Similarly, S. Japhet

G. N. Knoppers, I Chronicles 10-29 (AB 12A; New York, 2004), pp. 946–47. The aleph prefix to an Old Persian loan word is known from Imperial Aramaic (F. Rosenthal, J.C. Greenfield, and S. Shaked, “Aramaic,” Encyclopedia Iranica II/3, pp. 250–61), suggesting the word אדרכון came into Hebrew from Aramaic and not Greek. This might provide a clue to the dating and/or context of the text, at least suggesting the text dates from a period before the widespread adoption of Greek loan words.

Reading דרכמון as δραχμή (drachma) in fact has implications for dating Ezra and Nehemiah: it may be an anachronism in those contexts.

Knoppers, pp. 946–47.
remarks on the parallels between this episode and what is envisioned in Exod 25 ff., in its theme of “free-will offering;” she comments also that the people give more than David. However, she too does not provide a reason for the use of the term. P. Altmann compares 1 Chr 29 with Ezr 1 and Ezr 2:68-69, and notes that both collections of offerings begin with the donation by a royal figure. Of the recent commentators, only W. Johnstone and H.G.M. Williamson suggest a reason for the use of the term.

Williamson points out that this is not the only anachronism in the chapter: “the gold of Ophir” was similarly unknown in the time of David, as it was brought to Israel by Solomon in 1 Kgs 9:28. Given the tight links constructed between David and Solomon in Chronicles, this small slippage is consistent with other passages giving credit to David in Chronicles for what Solomon accomplished in Kings. This logic does not work for darics, as they are not mentioned in Kings. Williamson suggests that the use “may be compared with the attempt of some modern Bible translations to give up-to-date equivalents when rendering sums of money.” However, this explanation does not account for the fact that “gold talent” (ככר זכר) is also used in the verse, and introducing coinage was not necessary. Johnstone follows Williamson in supposing that daric is

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8 Williamson, p. 184.
used to bring the unit of currency up to date. He goes further in suggesting why two
types of gold were contributed: coins were represented by the daric, and weight was
represented by the talent.\(^9\) The problem with this argument is that no similar
distinction of coins and weight is made for silver. Johnstone earlier demonstrates that
the sequence in v. 7 is in declining order of value of the precious metals, as in v. 2;\(^\text{10}\)
following his reasoning, darics presumably lie between gold talents and silver talents in
value: darics are gold, but somehow in coin form they are not worth as much as gold in
talents.

The daric, or \(\text{δαρεικός στατήρ}\), is known by that term only from Greek texts, and
had a silver counterpart, the siglos (\(\text{σίγλος}\)). There is no mention of darics in the
surviving Imperial Aramaic texts. The Greeks also referred to the daric and siglos coins
as \(\text{τοξόται}\), “archers,” which led to the identification of the coin impressions found at
Persepolis. The term \(\text{δαρεικός}\) began appearing in Greek literary texts in the 5\(^{th}\) century
BCE, and the earliest epigraphic use is from Athens in 429/428 BCE.\(^\text{11}\) The earliest
example of a \(\text{τοξότης}\) is an impression from the Persepolis Fortification Tablets dated to

\(^9\) W. Johnstone, \textit{1 \& 2 Chronicles, Vol. 1: 1 Chronicles 1 - 2 Chronicles 9: Israel's Place}

\(^\text{10}\) Johnstone, pp. 285–86.

the 22nd regnal year of Darius I, i.e., 500/499 BCE. The gold daric coin, with its archer on the obverse and incused rectangle on the reverse, was minted throughout the 5th and 4th centuries. There are four main types, although Type I is known only from sigloi, while Types III and IV, from c. 480 on and from c. 450 on, respectively, accounted for most of the production as represented by finds. While the specifically Achaemenid form ended production with the end of the empire, the word δαρεικός continued to be used to refer to gold coins, as in e.g., δαρεικοὶ Φιλίππειοι. This little-known fact (to biblical scholars, at least) has implications for the use of the appearance of “daric” for dating Chronicles. The use of “daric” in 1 Chr 29 allows for a terminus post quem of 500 BCE; but contrary to Williamson, who has been followed by most if not all scholars of the past four decades, the use of “daric” does not allow a terminus ante quem of c. 330 BCE. A Hellenistic-period date for Chronicles cannot be ruled out by the use of the term “daric.” The broader implications of dating Chronicles are beyond the scope of this note.

The folk etymology for the δαρεικὸς στατήρ in Greek was that it was named for Darius I, but it was likely a Persian word originally, derived from dari-, “gold,” as -ka is a common suffix for derived nouns in Old Persian. The daric seems to have been aimed

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13 Alram, “Daric.”


at the western part of the Achaemenid empire, or at least used there the most. M. Alram suggests that it was conceived of as a “superregional trading currency,” although P. Vargyas argues that coinage is not generally aimed at external audiences, and that the daric was designed to show imperial power to those within the empire.\textsuperscript{16} As a coin, it had too great a value to have been used for everyday transactions, so it would have been used for large-scale trade. However, because very few have been found in hoards, the general distribution and usage patterns remain unclear. Altmann suggests that their uniqueness led to them having “significant symbolic value.”\textsuperscript{17}

Coins had symbolic value generally in the ancient world. However, the fact that the daric was known colloquially in Greek as τὸ ἄγχος, “archer,” highlights the importance of the iconography and its symbolic value. The archer figure is not labelled, but it is hard to imagine that it was an image of anyone other than the Achaemenid king. The arguments are summarized by D. Stronach, with thorough recent discussions by C. Nimchuk and C. Tuplin.\textsuperscript{18} The coin’s overall iconography bears greatest resemblance to

\begin{itemize}
\item Altmann, p. 103.
\end{itemize}
Persian Court Style seals, themselves rare and high-status items.\textsuperscript{19} There is also a correspondence with the so-called Testament of Darius at Naqsh-i-Rustam (DNa-b). The second half of that text reads, in part: “As a horseman, I am a good horseman. As a bowman, I am a good bowman, both on foot and on horseback. As a spearman, I am a good spearman, both on foot and on horseback” (DNb 38-45). In the first half of the inscription, after a list of the territories of Darius’s empire, the text reads, “It shall be known to you – the spear of a Persian man has gone far; it shall be known to you – a Persian man has made battle far from Persia” (DNa 43-47). The archer of the coin – the Persian man – circulated far from Persia, and the Persian man was epitomized by Darius. The Type III daric, which had the figure carrying both bow and spear, seems especially close to this description.\textsuperscript{20} (Figure 1: a Type III daric.)

Nimchuk has suggested that the coins were not necessarily designed as currency, given that their value was high.\textsuperscript{21} With previous authors, she argues that their value as bullion was their primary use. The imagery on them could signify that they were prestige items, given as part of the Achaemenid system of royal gift-giving.\textsuperscript{22} She

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Root} Root, p. 8; Nimchuk, p. 64.
\bibitem{Tuplin} Tuplin, p. 143.
\end{thebibliography}
claims that by having coins or medallions of a standard size and weight, “the king could easily vary the size of his gift according to the status of the recipient.” 23 The use of archers, whether darics or sigloi, at Persepolis suggests that they were seen in the heartland as symbolizing high status. P. Briant suggests that by minting gold, the Achaemenids increased the value of gold beyond its value as bullion, used the minted gold to impose an imperial standard of tribute, and circulated an ideology of Darius as a royal founder. 24

Having established that the daric was not just any coin, but had rich symbolic value, depicting the Achaemenid king as warrior, with his reach spreading far through his Empire, we can return to 1 Chr 29:7. There are two salient points. First, as Johnstone showed (above), gold is listed both as weight (talent, כר) and coin (daric, אדרון). Second, as Japhet noted, it is only the people who pay in darics; in v. 2, David pays his gold in talents alone. 25 Together with our expanded understanding of the daric, these two points lead to a better explanation of the appearance of the term in this passage.

Compared with the gold in talents (5000 talents equals about 150 tonnes), the amount of gold in 10,000 darics is miniscule (about 84 kg, or slightly less than 3 talents). Any reader of the text in the Persian or Hellenistic period would have recognized the lopsidedness. Thus, it is not the amount of gold but the form of the gold and the symbolism of the numbers that is critical: two coins for every talent. Silver is

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23 Nimchuk, p. 68.

24 Briant, p. 409.

25 Japhet, p. 508.
not given in its coin form, which was σίγλας in Greek – the Mesopotamian-Levantine שקל (shekel). The shekel was borrowed directly from the preceding kingdoms, and in its Achaemenid coin form circulated primarily in Anatolia. The daric, on the other hand, was a particularly Achaemenid item, even though based roughly on the Lydian Croesid. The daric symbolized Empire. Even if Chronicles is dated to the Hellenistic period, this argument holds, as the δαρεικός continued to be an imperial coin.\(^{26}\)

If it is not the sheer amount of gold that is important in the use of darics in 1 Chr 29:7, it is the symbolic value that is important. If we follow Nimchuk’s argument, the fact that only the people use darics for their payment makes sense. Darics were prestige items, received by individuals as part of royal patronage; where else would they have come from?\(^{27}\) David would not pay in darics, because to do so would be to imply that he had a royal overlord from whom he had received these tokens. In the world of the story, the people would have received their darics from David at some point, and now they are returning them, not to David, but to the temple. They have shifted their clientage to the


\(^{27}\) Cf. Xen. *Anab.* 1.9, which describes darics being given by Cyrus the Younger to the Spartan exile Clearchus.
temple from David. The people here are the members of the קַהּל (qāhāl), themselves men of status; this is not a general call to the Israelites as in Exod 25:2. Because the Persian-ness (or imperial-ness) of the word is obvious, it also carries a comment about the imperial regime in the world of the Chronicler: the people’s clientage is with the temple, not the current purveyor of darics, the imperial king or governor. This subtle comment is aimed not so much at far-away Susa or Persepolis, but at the governor’s residence at Ramat Rahel.28

The little word אדריכון, daric, carries a weight of meaning in 1 Chr 29:7 and has implications for understanding how monarchy and empire were thought of by the author of Chronicles. We may assume that David behaved as a proper imperial monarch by distributing darics, gold coins with imperial symbolism, to his followers. The people, by using them for contributing to the temple service (not the building of the temple itself), indicate that their primary loyalty is not to an imperial ruler but to the service of their temple. There was a place for an imperial ruler until the temple was founded, and that place was for him to found the temple. We may compare the very end of 2 Chr 36, where the imperial ruler Cyrus’s role is to call for the Judahites to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple. After the temple is built, there is no place for an imperial ruler, but only a temple servant, as 2 Chronicles shows in its accounts of the deeds of various kings. While we can see this argument being made throughout Chronicles, even the smallest detail of “darics” serves to reinforce the argument.

28 I am grateful to Louis Jonker for this last observation.