

Dressing Daniel: Identity Formation and Embodiment in Daniel 1–6

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Abstract

In the book of Daniel, Daniel and his friends all adopt foreign dress to succeed in a foreign setting. We might understand this as a kind of colonization, wrought upon bodies. But this raises questions about their ethnic identity: can one remain Jewish if adopting and adapting to foreign embodied practices, including dress, adornment, and diet? By exploring embodied practices as an issue of ethnicity and identity formation in Daniel 1–6, we will argue that these stories make a bold claim about the embodied colonization of the foreign court: underneath their Persian garb, Daniel and his friends remain thoroughly Jewish after all.

Keywords

Daniel 1–6 – Genesis 39–41 – Book of Esther – court tales – clothing – adornment – embodiment

1 Introduction

As the primary canonical examples of the genre known as the “court tale,” Daniel 1–6, Genesis 39–41, and the book of Esther are often studied in light of

one another.¹ Broadly dating to the Persian period,² these edifying tales locate a Jewish hero or heroine within the royal court of a Gentile ruler. Yet despite this hostile social context, Joseph, Esther, Mordecai, and Daniel and his friends all rise to prominent positions within the court setting. Consequently, a primary reading strategy for these court tales is that they present a “lifestyle for the diaspora”: they illustrate and model a way for the Jewish people to survive and even thrive within a foreign environment, and hence were likely originally composed outside of Judea.³

An additional commonality between these three stories is that at crucial points within the narrative, a central character is dressed in clothing which signifies the promotion of the individual within the royal court. In the book of Genesis, it is Pharaoh who provides Joseph with new garments:

Pharaoh took his signet ring from his own hand and put it on Joseph's. He clothed him with fine linen clothes and put a gold chain around his neck. Pharaoh had him ride in the chariot used by his second-in-command,

- 1 Non-canonical examples of the court tale include *Ahiqar*, *Tobit*, *Judith*, and several texts recovered from Qumran (4Q242; 4Q552, 4Q553, 4Q552a; 4Q243, 4Q244, 4Q245; 4Q550; 4Q551).
- 2 The book of Esther locates itself in the Persian period, and the Hebrew of Esther contains more Akkadian and Aramaic loanwords in proportion to its length than any other book in the Hebrew Bible. See Dalley, *Esther's Revenge*, 165–84. Consequently, the narrative likely has its origins within the Persian period. On the other hand, according to the traditional source critical approach to Genesis 39–41, the Joseph Story can be divided between J and E sources, and hence dated to the earliest period of the monarchy in Israel. For this approach to the dating of the Joseph story, see e.g., Wills, *Jewish Novel*, 158–62. Alternatively, Donald Redford (*Joseph*) has noted significant parallels between the language of the Joseph story with Persian period biblical texts. Indeed, the Joseph story can be omitted from the history of Israel's patriarchs without seriously impairing the narrative, suggesting the material to be of a later origin than the rest of the patriarchal saga. Consequently, and in recognition of the generic parallels between the Joseph story with the other court tales under discussion, a Persian period date can similarly be forwarded for this text. The canonical book of Daniel most probably took shape in the furore of the persecution of Antiochus that led up to the Maccabean Revolt, however the original independence of the story cycle that make up Daniel 1–6 is confirmed by the existence of diverse Daniel traditions from Qumran (see n. 1, above). Many scholars therefore suggest the Persian period as the probable context for the origins of these stories. See e.g., Koch, *Daniel*, 61–66; and Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 35–38. Thus, all three of these tales likely have origins within the broad temporal context of the Persian period. Nevertheless, the canonical book of Daniel was likely edited together during and as a response to the Maccabean Revolt in 167–164 BCE, and therefore postdates Genesis 39–41 and the book of Esther in its current form.
- 3 See esp. Humphreys, “Life-style.” Nevertheless, in the case of the book of Daniel, these diaspora tales were likely edited together in the context of the Maccabean Revolt and so in Jerusalem. See n. 2, above.

and they cried out before him, 'Kneel down!' So he placed him over all the land of Egypt (41:42–43).⁴

Joseph's garments of fine linen and his golden chain are therefore symbolic of his introduction into the Egyptian court, adopting their foreign royal robes⁵ and distinguishing his new authority in Egypt as a ruler second only to Pharaoh.

In the book of Esther, Esther's promotion as queen is also formalized through the gift of items of adornment from the king: "He placed the royal turban on her head and appointed her queen" (2:17). The term כתר is only found in the Hebrew Bible in the book of Esther (1:11; 2:17; 6:8). Alison Salvesen connects the noun to the Hebrew root כתר, "to surround," suggesting that this was an item which required tying "rather than a crown in the usual sense of the word." As such, "turban" might be a more appropriate rendering of the term, implying some sort of fabric headwear.⁶ The term is related to the Greek κράσις, used by classical authors to describe the headgear worn by Persian kings in the Achaemenid period.⁷ As such, the unusual term highlights the alterity of Esther's new headdress: it is specifically an item of Persian royal dress, and hence cements her new identity as a queen in Persia. Haman also wishes to wear the clothing of kingship, in a comedy of errors in which Haman believes the king is speaking about him but in fact it is Mordecai who is to be honored. Haman suggests:

For the man whom the king wishes to honour, let them bring royal attire which the king has worn and a horse on which the king himself has ridden, and a royal crown on his head. Then let this clothing and this horse be given to one of the king's noble officials. Let him then clothe the man whom the king wishes to honour and let him lead him about through the plaza of the city on the horse, calling before him: "So shall it be done to the man whom the king wishes to honour!" (6:7–9).

The similarity of this request to the honoring of Joseph by Pharaoh was noted already in antiquity by Josephus, who synthesized the accounts, adding that

4 English translations are based on the New English Translation (NET), with alterations where necessary. Verse enumeration follows the Hebrew.

5 Joseph is adorned in שש, which is used primarily in the early stages of Biblical Hebrew. The term frequently occurs in biblical texts associated with Egypt (e.g., Ezek 27:7). Middle Kingdom texts provide the term šs ("linen"), affirming an Egyptian origin. See Lambdin, "Loan Words," 155; and Brenner, "White," 40.

6 Salvesen, "כתר," 39.

7 Ibid., 35–66.

Haman also asked for a golden chain (*Ant.* 11.6.10). But rather than Haman, it is Mordecai the Jew who is dressed in the royal clothing and crown (6:11). And ultimately, the story concludes with Mordecai dressed in garments which are indicative of his new status as favored courtier: "Now Mordecai went out from the king's presence in purple and white royal attire, with a large golden crown and a purple linen mantle" (8:15). This extends the description of Mordecai's new attire: he is adorned with "royal apparel of purple and white" and "a robe of fine linen and purple." Additionally, his crown is now not just golden but also great. This goes beyond Joseph's regalia and Haman's request, cementing Mordecai himself as "great" within the king's palace (9:4).

In the book of Daniel, clothing is once again used to mark out a character's favored status, dependent upon his ability to properly interpret a mysterious inscription that has appeared upon the wall during a royal banquet: "The king proclaimed to the wise men of Babylon that anyone who could read this inscription and disclose its interpretation would be clothed in purple and have a golden collar placed on his neck and be third ruler in the kingdom" (5:7). Ultimately, it is Daniel of all the king's wise men who provides the correct interpretation, and therefore it is he who receives the new clothing: "Daniel was clothed in purple, a golden collar was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed third ruler in the kingdom" (5:29).

The specifics of these sartorial transformations are therefore remarkably similar. In each, clothing made either from fine linen or colored purple,⁸ and golden items of adornment including necklaces and crowns, are utilized to mark a change in status: the Jewish individual has been accepted into the foreign court and hence now wears foreign royal garb. Indeed, the significance of clothing as an important motif and plot device in the Joseph Story and the book of Esther has been well explored in secondary literature.⁹ This relates to an increasing recognition among scholars of the Hebrew Bible and ancient Jewish literary tradition: that the body is the visual center in which complex ideologies of identity, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and social status are articulated.¹⁰ On the other hand, the implications of clothing in the book of Daniel

8 On the significance of these coloured clothing items see Lyell, "Chromatic Dialogues."

9 On clothing in the Joseph Story, see Matthews, "Anthropology"; Huddelstun, "Divestiture"; and Ede, "Garment Motif." On clothing in the book of Esther, see Siebert-Hommes, "Third Day"; Spoelstra, "Agagites"; Quick and Lyell, "Clothing"; and Billington, "Social Standing." Rachel Adelman (*The Female Ruse*, 217–18, 222–24) has compared the theme of deception in the stories of Esther and Joseph, showing the importance of clothing in this theme.

10 For example, Deborah Sawyer ("Gender Strategies") has explored the construction of identity in the book of Judith, and in particular the ways in which gender identities are subverted throughout the narrative. Rhiannon Graybill ("Masculinity") has explored the

have hitherto received little attention from scholars.¹¹ Yet as we contend in this essay, embodied practices including dress and diet are crucial to understanding not only the book of Daniel, but to these texts providing a “lifestyle for the diaspora” more generally. T.M. Lemos has argued that the position of Daniel and his friends vis-à-vis their overlords “are textbook colonialism.”¹² And as we have seen, Joseph, Esther, Mordecai, and Daniel and his friends all adopt foreign dress in order to succeed in a foreign setting. A further theme shared by these tales is that of diet and food: Joseph is appointed over the Egyptian food stores (Gen 41:34–36, 48–49); Esther attends and hosts several banquets at the Persian court (Esth 2:18; 5:4–6; 6:14; 7:2); and the book of Daniel opens with a conflict over the Babylonian diet imposed upon Daniel and his friends (Daniel 1). We might understand all this as a kind of colonization, wrought upon and in bodies.¹³ And this raises questions about the ethnic identity of our heroes: can one remain Jewish if adopting and adapting to foreign embodied practices, including dress, adornment, and diet? Neither the Joseph Story nor the book of Esther really provide an answer to this problem, and Esther in particular ends her story apparently subsumed by the new ethnic identity which she has had to adopt.¹⁴ The intertextual connections which exist

way the demands placed on a prophetic body challenge Moses’ performance of masculinity. See also the essays collected in Taylor, *The Body*; and Stavrakopoulou, *Life and Death*.

11 One exception is Satran (“Daniel,” 35), who has considered the wearing of sackcloth in mourning in the construction of Daniel’s personal piety.

12 Lemos, “They Have Become Women,” 102.

13 We owe the language of embodied colonization to Soon, “Colonizing Apparel.”

14 See Quick and Lyell, “Clothing, Conformity.” This is brought into greater relief when comparing the books of Esther and Judith. Like Esther, Judith similarly uses cosmetics and clothing to gain favourable treatment from a foreign ruler. On Judith’s cosmetic and sartorial transformation, see Brenner-Idan, “Clothing Seduces”; Vearncombe, “Adorning”; Sawyer, “Gender Strategies”; Quick, “She Made Herself Up”; and Scales, “Military Action.” Indeed, many commentators have argued that the book of Judith was written to neutralize some of the more problematic elements of the book of Esther, in which the central female character does not abide by kosher food laws or offer prayers to God, unlike pious Judith. See Zeitlin and Enslin, *Judith*, 14. But while Esther marries her foreign ruler and so ends her story removed from her community, Judith assures all that she had enticed Holofernes without having sex with him (Jdt 16:22). Because of this, she is reincorporated back into her community at the end of the tale: unlike Esther, her disguise was a temporary one. The issues of identity and embodiment are also treated differently in the Greek versions of the book of Esther. There is an apparent distaste for the utilization of beauty and seduction, thus in the Alpha Text of Esther, Esther’s cosmetic treatments are revised from the story. Addition C has Esther abandon her cosmetics; instead “every part that she loved to adorn she covered with her tangled hair” (14:2). On the differences in the treatment of some of these issues between the Hebrew and Greek versions of Esther, see Quick, “Decorated Women,” 366.

between the purple and fine clothing and golden items of adornment in these three tales suggest that when Daniel dons his purple and golden garb, we are supposed to recall the earlier sartorial transformations of Joseph, Esther, and Mordecai.¹⁵ But the stories in Daniel 1–6 overall make a bold claim with regard to the embodied colonization of the foreign court: *underneath their Persian garb, Daniel and his friends remain thoroughly Jewish after all.*

In the following, we will consider embodied practices as an issue of ethnicity and identity formation in Daniel 1–6. Within this framework, Daniel 1 will be forwarded as the hermeneutic key to understanding Daniel 1–6. In this context, it is important to recognize that Daniel 1 was likely written after the stories in Daniel 2–6, as an introduction to these originally independent narratives.¹⁶ All the characters of the subsequent five tales are introduced in chapter 1, with a description of how they came to be in Babylon and at the court of Nebuchadnezzar.¹⁷ In contrast to Daniel 2–6, this chapter is written in Hebrew, perhaps to create a link with the apocalyptic visions which are also recounted in Hebrew in chapters 8–12.¹⁸ As such, Daniel 1 serves as an introduction to Daniel 2–6, highlighting and introducing the central issues which key the reader into how the subsequent tales should be interpreted and understood. Thus, in chapter 1 Daniel and his friends are taught a foreign language, given foreign names, and are encouraged to eat foreign foods. Their bodies and physical appearance are highlighted as the site in which the conflict between Babylonian and Jewish identities and practices will play out. But appearances can be deceptive. These men entrust their bodies to God, and it is their bodies which become the measure by which the conflict is assessed. This theme is then picked up in later chapters, which continue to highlight the physical appearance of the various characters. As such, in Daniel 1–6 bodies become battlegrounds in the construction of ethnicity and identity.

15 On the relative dating of these texts, see n. 2. While all the tales seem to have initially been composed in the Persian period, the crystallization of the canonical book of Daniel significantly postdates this, stemming from the period of the Maccabean Revolt. As other scholars have demonstrated, the Danielic court tales enter a sophisticated dialogue with earlier texts. For example, Julian Chike ("Nebuchadnezzar") has demonstrated the ways in which these stories recall and reshape stories about Nebuchadnezzar from earlier prophetic literature.

16 On the independence of the stories of Daniel 1–6, see n. 2, above.

17 On the compositional history of Daniel 1, see Nickelsburg, *Literature*, 20, 23.

18 The inclusion of chapter 7, written in Aramaic but containing an apocalyptic vision, is likely a further device to "bridge" between the different genres and languages that make up the book of Daniel. See Collins, *Daniel, with an Introduction*.

2 Daniel 1

The first chapter of the book of Daniel opens by introducing Daniel and his friends:

The king commanded Ashpenaz, who was in charge of his court officials, to choose some of the Israelites who were of royal and noble descent – young men in whom there was no physical defect and who were handsome, well versed in all kinds of wisdom, well educated, and having keen insight, and who were capable of entering the king's royal service – and to teach them the literature and language of the Babylonians (vv. 3–4).

Immediately, the narrative highlights the men's physical appearance. First, we learn that the Israelites are to be chosen by Ashpenaz, a Babylonian courtier who oversees the king's סריסים, translated here as “court officials.” This term already raises questions about the appearance and status of the Israelites' bodies since סריס can be used to describe castrates. This term occurs forty-five times in the Hebrew Bible. However, of these forty-five instances, only thirty of these are translated as εὐνῆχος, “eunuch,” in the LXX. This is because, while Greek εὐνῆχος is used to describe a castrated person, Hebrew סריס refers to an important person involved in the royal administration – someone who *might* be castrated but is not by default so. Potiphar in Gen 37:36 is a סריס, for example, but he is also married (see Genesis 39). Since Ashpenaz is רב סריסיו, “chief of his [sc. the king's] סריסים,” and Daniel and his friends are chosen to join this number, the possibility is raised that Daniel and his friends are themselves castrated. The LXX avoids this possibility by translating סריס in Dan 1:3 as ἀρχιμαγείρος, “chief of a royal guard.” Nevertheless, in his version of the story of Daniel, Josephus states that the young Israelite men were made into eunuchs (*Ant.* 10.186). How are we to understand סריס in Dan 1:3? Have Daniel and his friends had their testes and/or penises removed, in order to become suitable courtiers for the king?¹⁹

The answer lies in the continuation of the verse: these are to be “young men in whom there was no physical defect.” The term מום is used to describe various physical defects in the Hebrew Bible, some of which are outlined in Leviticus in the context of a prohibition against entering the temple:

19 This would not be unusual: it is possible that Nehemiah was castrated as part of his service to a foreign king. See Yamauchi, “Nehemiah.”

No man who has a *physical flaw* is to approach: a blind man, or one who is lame, or one with a slit nose, or a limb too long, or a man who has had a broken leg or arm, or a hunchback, or a dwarf, or one with a spot in his eye, or a festering eruption, or a feverish rash, *or a crushed testicle* (21:18–20).

While not specifically using the terminology of סריס, here מרוח שך, “crushed testicle,” clearly casts a person with damaged genitalia as someone in possession of מום, the very physical defect which Daniel and his friends are said to lack.²⁰ It is unlikely, therefore, that these men are castrated; the term instead indicates their position within the royal household. The men must also be טובי מראה, here “handsome.” A more literal translation of this clause would be men who are “good in appearance.” In Biblical Hebrew, the lexemes typically used to denote human attractiveness derive from the root יפה, “to be beautiful,” and טוב, “good.”²¹ Yet there is a difficulty in interpreting this latter lexeme, since טוב has a wide application and can refer to spiritual or moral qualities as well as to physical characteristics. It is therefore used in parallel to terms such as צדק, “righteous” (1 Kgs 2:32; Prov 2:20; 14:19) and ישר, “upright” (Ps 125:4).²² Even in cases where the term modifies a human being and the context suggests that it describes a physical characteristic, it is still not straightforwardly the case that it must refer to beauty or attractiveness.²³ The other characteristics ascribed to the young men in Dan 1:3–4 refer to internal qualities rather than external appearances: the men are to be “well versed in all kinds of wisdom, well educated, and having keen insight.” Does טוב in v. 4 therefore similarly relate to these men’s internal rather than external qualities?

In the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the translators tend to supply the word κάλλος, “beauty,” for טוב only when it is in construct with a defining phrase, either “in form” (בתאר) or “in appearance” (במראה), and thus explicitly referring to a physical quality.²⁴ Since it is the appearance of the young men which is said to be טוב here in v. 4, we should therefore interpret this as a

20 Indeed, crushing the testes was a common way to create a eunuch in the ancient Near East. See Lemos, “Eunuch.”

21 See Ringgren, “*yāpā*”; and Höver-Johag, “*tôb*.”

22 For more examples of טוב used as an ethical or moral quality, Kaminski, “Beautiful Women,” 470.

23 For example, the NRSV translates 1 Sam 9:2 as: “He had a son whose name was Saul, a handsome (טוב) young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome (טוב) than he.” But the LXX describes Saul as ἀνὴρ ἀγαθός, “a good man.” According to some commentators, טוב here refers not to Saul’s good looks but to his fitness to rule. See Brenner, *Intercourse*, 44 n. 52.

24 Konstan, *Beauty*, 140.

designation of their external characteristics.²⁵ This is confirmed since the designation is coupled with the requirement that the men lack physical defects. The importance of wholeness in biblical conceptions of the body was noted already by Mary Douglas,²⁶ and Saul Olyan has gone on to demonstrate that a lack of defects is characteristic of the biblical conception of beauty. Thus the “defects” described in texts such as Lev 21:18–20 are antithetical to beauty in the thought world of the Hebrew Bible.²⁷ The men in vv. 3–4 are therefore to be chosen based on their physical beauty, which is itself related to their lack of physical flaws. To be sure, they are also required to have skills in discernment. Yet in the hierarchy of characteristics presented in vv. 3–4, knowledge is presented secondary to the physical appearance of the men, which is therefore introduced as the primary requirement in their selection. At the very outset of the book of Daniel, the physical bodies of Daniel and his friends are highlighted as key to their selection and promotion in the royal court.

The text goes on to introduce the young men who apparently meet the physical requirements:

As it turned out, among these young men were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. But the overseer of the court officials renamed them. He gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar, Hananiah he named Shadrach, Mishael he named Meshach, and Azariah he named Abednego (vv. 6–9).

Immediately, we learn that these men are from Judah. In fact, in v. 3 their ethnic lineage was already stressed: these are Israelite men “of royal and noble descent.” As such, they have Judean names with theophoric elements that stress their heritage: Daniel means “God is my judge”; Hananiah “the Lord is gracious”; Mishael “who is what God is?”; and Azariah “the Lord has helped me.” But these Judean men are to be taught “the literature and language of the Chaldeans” (v. 4). They are therefore given Babylonian names, with Babylonian theophoric elements: Belteshazzar may mean “Bel, protect his life” (cf. Dan 4:8); “Bel,” meaning “lord,” is an alternative name for the chief Babylonian deity, Marduk. Similarly, Shadrach may be an intentional perversion of Marduk.

25 The LXX translation of טוב in Dan 1:4 is εὐετής, “well shaped,” which similarly suggests a physical attribute.

26 Douglas, *Purity*, 51–52.

27 Olyan, *Disability*, 26–46. William Dryness (“Aesthetics,” 430 n. 20) suggests that מום functions as the Old Testament equivalent to ugliness. Brenner (*Intercourse*, 45) has argued that while some characteristics of beauty are unique to each sex, the ideal of a flawless body was shared for both genders.

Abednego means “servant of Nego,” where “Nego” is an alternative spelling of Nebo, another Babylonian god.²⁸ Their beautiful bodies and stellar Judean heritage were essential to their promotion to the royal court. But with this comes a new language, a new literary tradition, even a new name. Right at the outset of the book of Daniel, acculturation is introduced as the central issue of these stories. Their Jewish heritage, explicit in their names, is subsumed under their new Babylonian names and identities. And by highlighting the role of the men’s physical appearance within the workings of this issue, the bodies of Daniel and his friends are focalized as the site of the conflict between Babylonian and Jewish identity.

Thus, it is not only the language and names of these men which the Babylonians wish to control. They also seek to control the young men’s bodies, in the form of their diet. The men are assigned a daily ration, the very food and drink which the king himself eats (v. 5). This raises a problem for the Judeans: “Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the royal delicacies or the royal wine. He therefore asked the overseer of the court officials for permission not to defile himself” (v. 8).

The precise nature of Daniel’s complaint with his new diet is not unpacked within the narrative. It could be that some of this food conflicted with the dietary laws outlined in Leviticus 11; 17:10–14. However, Daniel’s alternative diet of vegetables and water is even more stringent than the Levitical requirements. It is also not an issue of eating food from the king’s table: Jehoiachin, for example, eats the king’s food in 2 Kgs 25:30, and is not subject to criticism. The term used to describe their new diet is a Persian loanword (פתבג).²⁹ And this is the key to understanding why Daniel refuses to partake in the king’s favored diet: the unusual loanword highlights the alterity of the foodstuffs, designating them as foreign.

The issue of foreign food was clearly an important one in the Second Temple period. In the book of Esther, Esther attends several banquets alongside her Persian husband.³⁰ There is no suggestion that at any of these events, Esther kept the Jewish dietary laws. But this seems to have troubled the translator of the Old Greek of Esther, who adds LXX Esth 14:17 in order to explicitly state

28 The meaning of “Meshach” is uncertain. On the etymology of these names, see Wood, *Daniel*, 36; and Miller, *Daniel*, 65. Names in the Hebrew Bible and wider ancient Near East could have huge significance and cultural weight. In the case of theophoric names, these can attest to the religious affiliation of the name-owner. See Fowler, *Personal Names*, 17.

29 Outside of Daniel 1 it is only found in the Hebrew Bible in Dan 11:26, where it occurs in the same context, as a description of royal food.

30 On the theme of banquets in Esther, see Plietzsch, “Eating”; and Miles, “Esther.”

that Esther avoided non-kosher food.³¹ Indeed, one of the primary reading strategies for the book of Judith suggests that this text was written to “neutralize” the book of Esther: this narrative is sure to emphasize that Judith brought along with her a basket of her own food when dining with her foreign ruler.³² Consequently, Daniel and his friends refuse to eat the foreign food. The narrative continues:

Then God made the overseer of the court officials sympathetic to Daniel. But he responded to Daniel, ‘I fear my master the king. He is the one who has decided your food and drink. What would happen if he saw that you looked malnourished in comparison to the other young men your age? If that happened, you would endanger my life with the king!’ (vv. 9–10).

The overseer reveals that the instruction concerning the young men’s diet has come directly from the king. While he is sympathetic to Daniel’s request, the king would apparently be less receptive: he therefore worries that should he fail to promote the king’s favored diet, his own life would be endangered.

In this context, it is the bodies of the young men which could potentially give the overseer away. He asks Daniel, literally: “Why should he see your faces thin from the young men who are according to your age?” The verb זָעַר occurs only here and in the Joseph Story in Gen 40:6, where it describes the appearance of Pharaoh’s officials following disturbing dreams: “When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that *they were looking depressed*.” The lexeme is probably related to an Arabic word meaning “to be weak.”³³ Thus rather than a dejected facial expression, here in the book of Daniel it likely relates to a description of emaciation. But Daniel is not worried. He decides to go over the overseer’s head and speak directly to the warden, offering a challenge: “Please test your servants for ten days by providing us with some vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who are eating the royal delicacies; deal with us in light of what you see” (vv. 11–13).

The overseer had worried that the men’s bodies would give away their subversive diet. But Daniel weaponizes these worries, turning his body into the very sign of his continued health and divine favor. He asks that his body be compared with the other men at court who have continued to eat the king’s

31 This is also the case in rabbinic literature, see Bronner, “Esther.”

32 On the compositional relationship between the books of Esther and Judith, see Zeitlin and Enslin, *Judith*, 14. The Additions to Esther, in which Esther is also stated to have avoided non-kosher food (LXX Esth 14:17), may themselves be dependent on the book of Judith. See *ibid.*, 15–21; and Moore, *Judith*, 215–16.

33 HALOT 277 s.v. זָעַר.

diet: the bodies of Daniel and his friends are engaged in a literal contest between differing ways of life, the Judean and the Babylonian. And far from being emaciated, at the end of the ten days we learn: “Their appearance was better and their bodies were healthier than all the young men who had been eating the royal delicacies” (v. 15). Daniel and his friends are *וּבְרִיאֵי בֶשֶׂר טוֹב*, “good and fat of flesh.” The term *בְּרִיא* is also used in Judg 3:17 to describe King Eglon of Moab, and debate has raged as to whether this is meant to be pejorative or not. The LXX understands this as a positive appellation: “And Eglon was a very handsome man.” But most modern translations interpret this as a description of Eglon’s corpulence.³⁴ In this context, the detail about Eglon’s weight is often understood as a humorous element in the narrative.³⁵ But elsewhere, being “fat of flesh” has no such negative or humorous connotations. In the Joseph Story, *בְּרִיא* denotes the “fat” cows of Pharaoh’s dream, which are also said to be *יָפָה*, “beautiful” (Genesis 41). In Ps 73:4, bellies which are “fat” are paralleled to bodies that feel no pain. Accordingly, in the biblical imagination being “fat of flesh” indexes vitality, well-being, and health.³⁶ As J.K. Aitken has demonstrated, “a sign of both success and health was to be fat, indicating access to plentiful foodstuffs.”³⁷ Here in the book of Daniel, being “fat of flesh” is in hendiadys with *טוֹב*, “good”: the physical appearance of these men is explicitly evaluated in positive terms; we therefore infer that the bodies of the Judean men “were *healthier*” than their Babylonian counterparts.

Consequently, the warden allows the Judean men to continue with their diet (v. 16). But it is not only the warden that recognizes the superiority of the bodies of Daniel and his friends: “When the king spoke with them, he did not find among the entire group anyone like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, or Azariah. So they entered the king’s service” (v. 19). Once again, Daniel and his friends have been favorably compared to their Babylonian counterparts. The text continually pits Judean bodies against Babylonian. Initially, the good looks and impressive Judean lineage of the young men lead to their selection for royal service. While the overseer thought that their Judean diet might diminish these good looks, Daniel shows that it is the opposite that is true: their physical appearance and bodies continue to exceed that of the Babylonians. And crucially, it is *because* their bodies conformed to their ancestral dietary practices that they win this competition. Their victory is such that no other is found to

34 NET, NRSV, ESV, KJV, etc.

35 E.g., Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 37–41.

36 And this is probably how the term should be understood in Judg 3:17. See Stone (“Eglon’s Belly,” 654), who argues that the term presents Eglon as “a formidable, healthy, robust man.”

37 Aitken, “Fat Eglon,” 145.

be comparable, and consequently they are promoted to “stand before the king” (v. 19). Unlike Esther, whose success at court is dependent upon her adoption of Persian diet and dress, the heroes of Daniel are successful precisely because their bodies remain Judean, even as their names and language are changed. While *externally* they adopt aspects of the colonizing culture, *internally* their Jewishness is not in doubt. Daniel 1 therefore introduces a key theme of the book of Daniel: that of ethnic identities in competition. And this is a competition which will quite literally play out upon the bodies of the central protagonists. Bodies become both the site of the conflict, as well as the measure by which the conflict can be assessed.

3 Daniel 3

Daniel 3 begins with a monumental body: the massive golden statue of Nebuchadnezzar which the king instructs all his subjects to bow down and pay homage to. Whoever refuses this command will be executed, burnt alive amidst a furnace of fire (vv. 5–6). In v. 14, the act of worshipping the statue is explicitly linked to serving the gods of Nebuchadnezzar: the issue concerns religious practice. And this is a command which is to transcend national identities and boundaries: all “peoples, nations, and language groups” must comply (v. 4). It is therefore an attempt at religious colonization, and the central conflict of the story becomes how Daniel’s friends will receive the instruction. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego respond that they will not pay homage to the statue, and the king is furious, commanding that the furnace be heated to several times its usual temperature (v. 19). Of Daniel’s friends, we learn: “Those men were tied up while still wearing their trousers, turbans, cloaks, and other clothes, and were thrown into the furnace of blazing fire” (v. 21).

Daniel’s friends are described wearing several specific items of clothing. The lexeme סרבל occurs only in Daniel 3 (vv. 21, 27). According to Carol Newsom, this term along with the subsequent two are likely derived from Persian vocabulary for describing dress.³⁸ This likely governs her translation of the term as “trousers.”³⁹ In ancient Israel and Judah, both men and women typically wore long tunics.⁴⁰ Trousers were introduced by and eventually became symbolic of Persian dress practices, thus in the iconography of Greece and Rome, trousers

38 See also Gzella, “Nudity,” 232.

39 Newsom, *Daniel*, 100, 224.

40 Quick, *Dress*, 4–15.

are one of the main indicators of Persians and Barbarians.⁴¹ In the LXX, the list of the men's clothing begins with the term ὑποδύτης. This is translated as "sandals" in NETS, but in fact the lexeme is also used in LXX Exod 28:31–33, 34; 36:29; 39:22 to describe the undergarments worn by priests and implying that the translator was likely envisioning the priests clad in breeches or trousers. Consequently, the LXX translator of Daniel 3 likely interpreted סרבל as a term for Persian-style trousers. The next term, פטיש also occurs within the implication of clothing only here in Dan 3:21. Newsom suggests translating the term as "shirts" (presumably to go with the trousers).⁴² But John Goldingay admits that the term is a puzzle, simply transliterating it rather than attempting to provide an English gloss.⁴³ In the LXX translation of this verse, the second clothing item is interpreted to mean πέτασος, "headwear." Therefore, the description seems to be moving from items which dress the lower body to items which dress the head, providing a systematic description of a dressed body. The lexeme כרבל is another hapax. Perhaps taking their key from the LXX, both Newsom and Goldingay interpret this as a reference to headwear, but there is nothing in the semantics of the term itself which necessitates this interpretation.⁴⁴ In fact, the term is clearly related to the pual participle מכרבל in 1 Chr 15:27, meaning "to be clothed," where it is used to describe how David is dressed in a מעיל, a robe or cloak. Headwear therefore seems an unlikely candidate. The list in the LXX is less full than the MT, providing only three to the MT's four clothing items; this list concludes with ἱμάτιον, a general term for an outer garment, which is probably the most likely referent of כרבל. The first three clothing items in the Aramaic text of Daniel 3:21 thus utilize unusual, rare loanwords to describe the trousers, headwear, and cloaks of these men. The final lexeme in the clothing list, לבש, a common term for clothing in the Hebrew Bible, is therefore likely included as a gloss on the more unusual vocabulary items which precede it.

While the precise meanings of these terms are very difficult to unpack, there are several interesting aspects to the description. The Greek translations of these terms suggest that the list moves across the body, including trousers, headgear, and robes. As such, it provides a description of a full outfit. Comprising four clothing items in the MT, this list is in fact the fullest inventory for male dress in the Hebrew Bible outside of the description of the priestly vestments. But the unusual terminology highlights the alterity of the items,

⁴¹ Mattern, *Rome*, 195–96.

⁴² Newsom, *Daniel*, 98.

⁴³ Goldingay, *Daniel*, 227.

⁴⁴ Newsom, *Daniel*, 98; Goldingay, *Daniel*, 224.

and trousers in particular are indicative of Persian dress practices.⁴⁵ Daniel's friends are dressed from head to toe in Persian clothing. Their outward appearance would suggest that they have accepted their new identities as courtiers in the foreign court. To the external viewer, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah appear to have fully adopted the foreign personas of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Consequently, the king expects that they will also bow down before his statue and accept his gods. Their clothing should serve as a marker that their bodies have been fully colonized by the foreign court. And yet the men refuse the king's request.

In this context it is significant that their Persian clothing, which should have been the signifier of their new identities within the foreign court, in fact becomes the marker of their other, alternate identity: that of Judean and a worshipper of the Judean God. God saves the men from the fire, and they are released from the furnace:

Once the satraps, prefects, governors, and ministers of the king had gathered around, they saw that those men were physically unharmed by the fire. The hair of their heads was not singed, nor were their trousers damaged. Not even the smell of fire was to be found on them! (v. 27)

We learn that the fire *בגשמהון נורא לא-שלט*, “did not have power over their bodies.” Their God has preserved them from harm. We might suggest that Nebuchadnezzar similarly does not have power over the bodies of these men. He attempted first to control their manner of worship; when this failed, he attempted to destroy their bodies entirely. But neither Nebuchadnezzar nor the fire holds any power over these men, and Nebuchadnezzar explicitly acknowledges this in his response to them:

Praised be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent forth his angel and has rescued his servants who trusted in him, ignoring the edict of the king and giving up their bodies rather than serve or pay homage to any god other than their God! (v. 8).

These men refuse to give their bodies over to Nebuchadnezzar. Instead, their bodies remain entirely in the control of their God. Though externally appearing Babylonian, internally they remain Judean, and their bodies and clothing

45 See also Gzella (“Nudity,” 232), who stresses that while the exact meaning of the first three terms in the Aramaic list are unknowable, the enumeration of foreign lexemes contributes to the foreign setting of the narrative.

serve as a marker of this, preserved from harm due to divine intervention. Their clothing is therefore not a symbol of their Babylonian acculturation after all, but in fact becomes the symbol of their preservation, surviving through the flames. Daniel 3 provides an answer to the issues of acculturation through dress raised in these diaspora court tales: underneath their foreign clothing, these men were Jewish all along.⁴⁶

4 Daniel 4

In Daniel 4, it is not the bodies of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah which are at stake, but the body of the foreign king. Nebuchadnezzar has an enigmatic dream, and from it Daniel elicits the following interpretation:

You will be driven from human society, and you will live with the wild animals. You will be fed grass like oxen, and you will become damp with the dew of the sky. Seven periods of time will pass by for you, before you understand that the Most High is ruler over human kingdoms and gives them to whomever he wishes (v. 22).

Daniel predicts several transformations that the king's body will be subjected to. He will live with animals, eat animal food, and his body will become damp with dew. This embodied experience will affect a transformation in the king's understanding, prompting a recognition that it is Daniel's God who controls the bodies of men. The actualization of Daniel's prediction then extends this by detailing further bodily transformations for the king: his hair and nails will take on the appearance of an animal's (v. 30).

⁴⁶ An interesting analogue may be found in Exodus 2. Moses is adopted by Pharaoh's daughter and given a new name (2:10). While the text itself gives the name "Moses" a folk etymology and relates it to the verb מָשַׁח, "to draw out" ("because I *drew him out* from the water"), the name is in fact Egyptian: the Egyptian hieroglyphic *ms* means "child" and is a common element in Egyptian theophoric names, e.g., Rameses, "child of Ra." See Cassuto, *Exodus*, 20. Thereafter, he is recognized by others as "an Egyptian man" (2:19). Yet his actions continually betray his real identity: he identifies with his "brothers," the Hebrews, and consequently kills an Egyptian who attacks them (2:11–12). He apparently settles into a new life with his Midianite father-in-law and wife, yet the very name he gives his own son betrays his discomfort: "Gershom, for he said, 'I have become a resident foreigner in a foreign land'" (2:22). The narrative is one of mistaken identity: though Moses outwardly may appear to be an Egyptian, his actions continually betray that inwardly, he is Hebrew after all. On embodiment and identity in the story of Moses, see Graybill, "Masculinity."

The intent of all this has perplexed commentators. The narrative clearly details a seven-year exile for the king; this is coupled with an affliction that draws on animalizing imagery. The angelic command is that Nebuchadnezzar's "heart be changed from that of a human and let the heart of an animal be given to it" (v. 13). In the thought world of the Hebrew Bible, the heart was understood to be the core of conscience and thought.⁴⁷ Thus we are to understand that Nebuchadnezzar's *mind* will be transformed to that of an animal: the text describes how the king will lose his mental faculties. But this also seems to be coupled with an embodied transformation, one that encompasses his hair, nails, diet, and physical location. Does this therefore imply that Nebuchadnezzar's mental transformation is to be coupled with a physical metamorphosis? In the early history of the interpretation of Daniel 4, this was a common reading strategy for the text.⁴⁸ But this embodied interpretation has increasingly fallen out of favor in the secondary literature, with scholars understanding the description merely as a characterization of mental illness,⁴⁹ and often uncritically employing medicalizing language or diagnosing the king with specific mental ailments such as lycanthropy.⁵⁰ On the other hand, Peter Atkins has recently renewed the embodied interpretation, by contextualizing Nebuchadnezzar's affliction within broader ancient Near Eastern historical and literary contexts. Atkins highlights many texts in which the human-animal boundary breaks down in order to demonstrate a particular character's lack of wisdom or insight, which is exactly how the transformation functions in Daniel 4.⁵¹ Consequently, it is probable that Daniel 4 envisions both a mental *and* a physical transformation for the king,⁵² one affected by Daniel's God and which in turn affects a transformation in the king's perception. Once he recognizes that it is God rather than he who rules over humanity, the king is finally restored: "At that time my sanity returned to me. I was restored to the honour of my kingdom, and my splendour returned to me" (v. 33). The term הדר can mean both "splendour" as well as "adornment, ornament," and is used to describe the royal splendour and adornments of a king.⁵³ Therefore we might interpret this verse as something of a pun: Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom and

47 See Fabry, "lēb."

48 Henze, *Nebuchadnezzar*, 101–202.

49 See e.g., Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 227–28; LaCocque, *Daniel*, 80; House, *Daniel*, 99; Cason, "Confessions," 97.

50 Beverly, "Nebuchadnezzar," 147.

51 Atkins, "Reading." See also Henze (*Nebuchadnezzar*), on whose work Atkins draws.

52 See also Plöger, *Daniel*, 77; Nelson, *Daniel*, 120.

53 For example, in Isa 63:1, where the term describes one wearing "royal attire," literally "honoured in his clothing."

hence his royal splendour have been returned to him, but perhaps also the clothing indicative of this role and status. In animal form, the king was dressed in feathers and claws; but now the king is dressed in human, royal clothing once again. Thus, in Daniel 4 it is the body of the foreign king which becomes the locus for the competition between Judah and Babylon. The king thought that he had the power to control and affect bodies, but Daniel's God shows that this power is solely his alone. Because the king does not recognize this power, his body and mind is transformed to that of an animal, and through this embodied experience, he comes to realize the power of Daniel's God.

5 Daniel 5

As we have seen, in Daniel 5 the hero is dressed in purple clothing and a golden collar as a sign of his promotion to be "third ruler" in the kingdom (vv. 7, 16, 29), and this has significant commonalities with the promotion of Joseph and Mordecai in the books of Genesis and Esther. But beyond the initial similarities in the descriptions, there are differences too. In Genesis, Joseph receives several items: fine linen clothing, a signet ring, and a golden chain. With these, he is promoted to Pharaoh's second in command (41:42–43). In Esther, Mordecai ends up dressed in two different types of purple clothing along with a linen mantle and a large golden crown (8:15). Consequently, he becomes "greater and greater" within the king's palace (9:4). But in contrast to Mordecai, Daniel receives only one purple clothing item. And rather than a golden crown or signet ring, Daniel receives only the golden necklace. In this context, it is significant that his promotion is also less than Joseph or Mordecai: he is only to be *third* within the kingdom. Crucial here is the ability of clothing to construct and promote hierarchies. Consequently, there are significant implications to the clothing items in these texts.

Joseph is dressed in שש, fine linen. This is an Egyptian loanword,⁵⁴ which stresses the alterity of his new garments: he is wearing the fine linen robes of Egyptian royalty, and therefore symbolic of his new rank in the Egyptian royal court. The term also occurs in the description of the tabernacle furnishing and priestly dress in the book of Exodus, where it is in fact coupled with ארגמן, "purple."⁵⁵ Joseph's clothing therefore has implications of prestige via its

54 See n. 5, above.

55 Exod 25:4; 26:1, 31, 36; 27:9, 16, 18; 28:5, 6, 8, 15, 39; 35:6, 23, 25, 35; 36:8, 35, 37; 38:8, 16, 18, 23; 39:2, 3, 5, 8, 27, 28, 29. Purple and fine linen are also coupled in Prov 31:22.

association with the Temple and the dress of the High Priest.⁵⁶ But it also suggests that fine linen and purple would have formed a semantic pairing in the thought world of ancient Judaism. The significance of purple as a royal color has been well-established in secondary literature: purple-dyed garments were worn by political leaders, royalty, and even adorned deities and cult statues across the ancient world.⁵⁷ Joseph's new linen garments have associations of elite prestige, and therefore it is unsurprising that his rank is second only to the Pharaoh.

Mordecai's introduction to the Persian court goes further even than Joseph as he is gifted *two* kinds of garments consisting of two different purple materials and two white-colored linen-based fabrics.⁵⁸ His position is thus "greater" still, something which is made explicit in the narrative (9:4). Both his sartorial transformation and related increase in rank go beyond Joseph's, serving to magnify the status and importance of the character.⁵⁹ But Daniel is dressed in only one item of purple clothing. The text thus promotes him, but nevertheless maintains that his promotion is less extensive than his counterparts in the other court tales.

There are also differences in the golden items of jewelry which each receive. Joseph is given a signet ring along with his golden necklace. In several biblical texts, the signet ring is an item symbolic of royal power. They have and can confer real, tangible power and authority, hence a law sealed by the personal ring of the king can stand in for the king in the case of his physical absence. Jezebel, for example, utilized King Ahab's signet ring to seal letters and therefore authorize them as authoritative (1 Kgs 21:8). In the book of Haggai, the designation of Zerubbabel as Yahweh's "signet" designates him as God's chosen king (2:23).⁶⁰ Joseph's gift of signet ring therefore gives him real, tangible authority at the royal court. Mordecai, on the other hand, receives a "great gold crown." Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, the עטרה adorns the heads of royals.⁶¹ Mordecai's crown is also said to be gold. In Esther, זיה is used only to describe Ahasuerus's royal scepter (4:11; 5:2; 8:4), the drinking vessels in the palace (1:7) – and for Mordecai's crown. This golden crown is therefore an item with significant associations of power and royalty. But Daniel receives only a necklace. What does this signify about his role and status at court?

56 On the significance of priestly dress, see Quick, *Dress*, 103–19.

57 See Reinhold, *Purple*.

58 On the significance of white coloured clothing, see Moss, *Divine Bodies*, 95–113; Brenner, "White," 41.

59 See Quick and Lyell, "Clothing."

60 Quick, *Dress*, 43–46.

61 Jer 13:18; Ezek 21:31; Ps 21:3; Song 3:11.

Susannah Rees has explored the function of wearing nose-rings in the Hebrew Bible. Nose-rings worn by women were utilized as a marker of their marriage.⁶² Rees builds upon this by considering the embodied experience of wearing nose-rings, as an item which is immediately visible upon the face of the wearer. Since nose-rings are utilized in the domestication of livestock, Rees suggests that they function as a symbol of control and an overt display of ownership of a woman's body.⁶³ In the same way, when considering Daniel's golden necklace, we must also consider the physical experience of wearing the item. Joseph wears an *רביד*, which is explicitly an item for adornment: in Ezek 16:11 it is associated with other prestigious and valuable items of jewelry. But Daniel receives an *המניך*, which occurs only here in Daniel 5. It is likely of Persian origin, from *hāmyān*, "girdle."⁶⁴ It is therefore an item of foreign dress, another instance of embodied colonization. And rather than a chain, the term seems to imply something more substantial: Daniel is given a *collar* made of gold, a heavy, cold, metal object worn around his neck. We might suggest that this item is perhaps more akin to a fetter than an item of adornment, and indeed, in the Hebrew Bible items worn upon the neck are often symbolic of domination and control.⁶⁵ Once again, while Daniel's clothing items seem to indicate his elevation, at the same time they maintain and stress his ultimate inferiority to the king. Though he is promoted, the king has gifted him items that suggest that he remains firmly under the king's control. And yet following all this we learn: "That very night Belshazzar, the Babylonian king, was killed" (v. 30). Belshazzar may have stressed Daniel's instrumentality via his sartorial gifts, but almost immediately, Belshazzar is himself killed. All bodies are in fact under God's control; hence God even controls the very breath of the King (v. 23). Daniel 5 once again stresses that outward appearances are deceptive. While Belshazzar's sartorial gifts attempted to maintain distinctions in the role and status of the king vis-à-vis his servant, ultimately it was the king who was found to be subordinate to Daniel's God.

6 Daniel 6

A final item of personal adornment occurs in Daniel 6. Jealous of Daniel's promotion, his rivals at the court collude against him. They goad King Darius to

62 Quick, *Dress*, 135–138.

63 Rees, "נִסִּים."

64 Ciancaglini, *Loanwords*, 161.

65 Gen 27:40; 49:8; Deut 28:48; Job 16:12; Ps 105:18; Prov 3:3; 6:21; Isa 10:27; 52:2; Jer 27:2; 28:10, 12; 29:26; Lam 1:14.

issue an edict: “Anyone who prays to any god or human other than you, O king, should be thrown into a den of lions” (v. 7). The king issued the decree which – as the text repeatedly stresses – cannot be altered or changed “according to the law of the Medes and Persians” (v. 8, 12, 15).⁶⁶ Upon realizing the implications for his favored courtier, the king immediately regrets his edict – but there is nothing that he can do. Daniel is thrown into the lions’ den and a stone is placed over the opening: “The king sealed it with his signet ring and with those of his nobles so that nothing could be changed with regard to Daniel” (v. 17). The purpose of the seal here is to prevent tampering with the opening of the den. But it also recalls the use of signet rings in other biblical books, in particular the book of Esther. Here the seal of the king is utilized by others to confirm royal authority to various legislation (3:10, 12; 8:2, 8, 10). In fact, we learn: “Any decree that is written in the king’s name and sealed with the king’s signet ring cannot be rescinded” (8:8). As we have already seen, the signet ring is a royal symbol, and hence can confer royal power to an individual, which is how it functions in both Genesis 39–41 and in the book of Esther. But in Esther it also becomes the symbol of the king’s ultimate powerlessness: like King Darius, Ahasuerus will come to regret his ruling against the Jews. But unable to rescind edicts sealed with his royal signet, his only recourse is to issue new legislation, allowing the Jews of Susa to assemble and defend themselves (8:11). In the book of Esther, then, the king is ultimately unable to reverse legislation that he himself has issued. In this context, his signet ring, the potent symbol of his royal authority, ultimately becomes a marker of this impotence.

This is also the case in Daniel 6: the signet sealing alongside the references to the king’s impotence in the face of his own legislation allude back to the book of Esther. Darius is just as ineffective as Esther’s king.⁶⁷ And beyond this, the seal ultimately serves as a marker that the lion’s den will remain undisturbed by any human hands. It therefore becomes a marker of the power of Daniel’s God: it is divine intervention which preserves Daniel from the lions. An item of adornment which should indicate royal power ultimately symbolizes power’s lack. Once again, external appearances are deceptive.

66 Most commentators stress that such a legal precedent is unknown in actual Persian practice, e.g., Moore, *Esther*, 11. However, according to LaCocque (*Daniel*, 113), Diodorus of Sicily records a case where Darius III was unable to undo a royal edict, despite coming to regret it.

67 In fact, as John Whitcomb has noted, in this chapter Darius the Mede “is not presented here as the supreme monarch of a Median empire but as a Mede who ruled Babylon under ‘the law of the Medes and Persians.’” See *Daniel*, 85 (italics in original).

7 Conclusions

In this essay, we have considered clothing and other embodied practices as an important theme in and key to understanding Daniel 1–6. These chapters provide a “lifestyle for the diaspora.” But in so doing, Daniel 1–6 along with Genesis 39–41 and the book of Esther provoke important questions about acculturation. Israelite and Judahite religion quite literally maps itself onto human bodies, in the form of the various legal texts which invoke divine authority for commandments concerning sex, hygiene, healthcare, burial – and diet and dress. However, Joseph, Esther, Mordecai, and Daniel and his friends all adopt foreign dress in order to succeed in a foreign setting. This is a kind of sartorial colonization, wrought upon bodies. Bodies become the battlegrounds of identity formation. Can one therefore really remain Jewish if adopting and adapting to *foreign* embodied practices?

While neither the Joseph Story nor the book of Esther really provide a robust answer to this problem, Daniel 1–6 makes a bold claim regarding the embodied colonization of the foreign court: underneath their Persian garb, Daniel and his friends remain thoroughly Jewish after all. The bodies of Daniel and his friends appear to be in the hands of the Babylonians, since they dictate their *external* appearances: their clothing, names, and language. But again and again, Daniel 1–6 stresses that *internally*, the Jewishness of these men is never in doubt. External appearance can therefore be deceiving. In fact, their bodies frequently serve as the symbol of their preservation and divine favor. It is God, these stories claim, who is ultimately in charge of human bodies.

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