AOSIS

Rereading Daniel 1 through the lens of trauma

Check for updates

Author:
Inchol Yang[1]

Affiliation:
[1]United Graduate School of Theology, Yonsei University, Seoul, Korea

Corresponding author:
Inchol Yang,
tothebible@yonsei.ac.kr

In this article, the author argued that the final literary form of the Book of Daniel, especially chapter one, reflects the cultural trauma during the reign of the Seleucid emperor Antiochus IV Epiphanes. After the Jewish community experienced Antiochus IV Epiphanes's devastation of Jerusalem in 167 BCE, Jews must have been reminded of Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE. Building upon Jan Assmann's cultural memory and Jeffrey Alexander's cultural trauma theory, the article will examine the features of Daniel 1 in the court tales. Behind the mask of King Nebuchadnezzar, the final editor of the Book of Daniel depicts King Antiochus IV Epiphanes' propaganda for the Hellenisation of Judeans, which ultimately proved unsuccessful. The cultural memory of Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE was ultimately fulfilled by YHWH. For later audiences living during the oppressive reign of King Antiochus IV Epiphanes, Daniel 1 functions as a heuristic tool for survival.

Contribution: This article contributes to trauma-informed biblical interpretation by presenting Daniel 1 as a post-traumatic literary response to Antiochus IV's persecution. It offers a new reading that situates the chapter within a framework of cultural memory and trauma theory, showing how the narrative supported Jewish identity and resistance during periods of imperial domination.

Keywords: Daniel; trauma; Cathy Caruth; Jeffrey Alexander; Jan Assmann; Antiochus IV.

Introduction

[1]Biblical scholars have long applied trauma theories to interpret texts in the aftermath of catastrophes.[2] Their scholarly discussions have primarily focused on Ezekiel and Jeremiah during the Babylonian exile. Indeed, since the destruction of the Jerusalem temple by the Neo-Babylonian Empire left indelible scars on survivors, scholars interpreting through the lens of trauma have provided insights into the Jewish community's theological perspectives immediately following the Babylonian exile. However, these studies have often focused too much on the first generation that experienced the Babylonian exile. What about the trauma experienced by subsequent generations? How did they interpret their circumstances when facing another catastrophe?

The analysis of the Book of Daniel offers a compelling answer to such questions. This article argues that the final literary form of the Masoretic Text, especially chapter one, reflects the cultural trauma experienced during the reign of the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes.[3] When analysing the Book of Daniel in relation to Antiochus IV Epiphanes, scholars have examined Daniel 7–12 as 'apocalyptic visions' composed during the reign of Antiochus IV, around 167 BCE, shortly before the rededication of the temple. For example, Reinhard G. Kratz argues that the book's apocalyptic framework is rooted in the events of the Maccabean revolt and that Antiochus IV serves as the concrete historical referent for the oppressive king in Daniel's visions (Kratz 2001:91–113). However, no one has attempted to analyse Daniel 1 in the context of Antiochus IV Epiphanes's oppression. After experiencing Antiochus IV's devastation of Jerusalem in 167 BCE, the Jewish community would have been reminded of Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of the city in 587 BCE.

1.This paper was presented in the Trauma, Social Identity, and Memory section at the 2025 SBL and EABS International Meeting in Uppsala, Sweden.

2.For a discussion of Trauma studies, see Kelle (2009:469–490), O'Connor (2011), Janzen (2012), Holt (2014), Boase (2017), and Markl (2020:1–25).

3.The Daniel manuscripts from Qumran are the earliest witnesses to the proto-Masoretic Text (MT) of Daniel, dating from the late second to first century BCE. The additional narratives preserved in the Greek tradition—*Susanna*, *Bel and the Dragon*, the *Prayer of Azariah*, and the *Song of the Three*—likely originated in the Hellenistic or early Roman period, possibly contemporaneous with, or even earlier than, the final MT form of Daniel. Theodotion's Greek translation, dating to the second century CE, should be distinguished from the earlier Old Greek version. Collins (2001:2:1–39).

Modern critical scholarship has extensively discussed the setting of Daniel 1–6. Lee Humphreys, after analysing Esther and Daniel 1–6, argues that the Jewish communities successfully maintained their traditions through creative and rewarding interactions with the Persian and Hellenistic empires (Humphreys 1973:211–223). Humphreys even insists that the composition Daniel 1–6 reflects the situation before the crisis of the period of Antiochus IV Epiphanes by denying the connection between Nebuchadnezzar and Antiochus IV Epiphanes.[4] However, while Daniel 1 shares with Daniel 2–6 a similar narrative pattern and an outwardly harmonious portrayal of the relationship among the Gentile king, Nebuchadnezzar and the Judean exilic elites, it subtly reconfigures this dynamic. Beneath the surface of apparent cooperation lies an implicit ideological contest, in which the narrative asserts the cultural and theological superiority of the Judean God and His faithful servants over imperial authority. In this respect, Daniel 1 functions both as an introduction to and a reframing of the court tale tradition, infusing it with a distinctly polemical subtext directed against the Gentile ruler. Similarly, Marvin Sweeney argues that close attention to the literary form of the book and its contents prepares the reader for the visions by demonstrating God's fidelity to righteous Jews and by alluding to Antiochus's faults (Sweeney 2012:450–451). Scholars such as Daniel Smith-Christopher, David M. Valeta, Jin Hee Han and Anathea Portier-Young have likewise argued that Daniel 1–6 reflects Jewish resistance to Antiochus IV's edicts and Hellenistic hegemony (Han 2008; Smith-Christopher 1996:19–152; Valeta 2005:309–324). Nevertheless, they have not examined in detail the cultural trauma of the Jewish community underlying the court tales in the aftermath of Antiochus IV's persecution.

This study adopts a synchronic reading of the Masoretic Text of Daniel 1, while remaining historically informed by the Antiochian crisis of 167 BCE. By 'synchronic', this article refers to an interpretation that attends to the literary and theological coherence of the received Masoretic Text (MT) form, irrespective of its diachronic compositional stages. Nevertheless, historical context is not ignored; rather, it serves as a heuristic frame to illuminate thematic resonances, without collapsing literary analysis into historical reconstruction. The study treats the Masoretic Text as the 'final form' of the Book of Daniel in the sense of the received canonical Hebrew edition. While alternative textual traditions such as the Old Greek and Theodotion reflect different compositional trajectories and contain additional materials, the MT serves as the primary basis for this study because it preserves the Hebrew opening of Daniel 1 and stands as the authoritative form in Jewish and most Christian canons. This integrated approach follows the methodological trajectory outlined by Kratz (2001:91–113), which allows the MT's canonical form to

4.Humphreys (1973:218–219). It is generally agreed that the court tales of Daniel -2–6 were originally composed and circulated in the late Persian and Hellenistic periods (Collins 1993:35–38; Holm 2013:4; Newsom 2014:9). Most scholars agree that Dan 1 as an introduction was first written in Aramaic with other court tales but later was translated in Hebrew. However, recently Quick and Lyell assert that although the court tales have origins 'within the broad temporal context the Persian period, the canonical book of Daniel was likely edited together during and as a response to the Maccabean Revolt in 167–164 BCE'. See Quick and Ellena (2022:2).

be interpreted in conversation with, yet distinct from, the events of the mid-2nd century.

Building upon Jan Assmann's cultural memory and Jeffrey Alexander's cultural trauma theory, this study examines the features of Daniel 1 in the court tales. Behind the mask of King Nebuchadnezzar, the final editor of the Book of Daniel depicts King Antiochus IV Epiphanes' propaganda for the Hellenisation of Judeans, which ultimately proved unsuccessful. The cultural memory of Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE was engraved in personal and family memories of the survivor generation. For later audiences living during the oppressive reign of King Antiochus IV Epiphanes, Daniel 1 functions as a heuristic tool for survival. After the horrendous catastrophe wrought by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, carrier groups such as the *maskilim* [wise teachers] (Daniel 11:33-35) and the *Hasidim* [pious ones] (1 Macc 2:42; 7:13) aimed to initiate the social process of cultural trauma. Antiochus' mass devastation of Jerusalem had long-lasting consequences for Judean society at large. It was incorporated into Judean cultural identity soon after Antiochus' death in 163 BCE and remembered as a cultural trauma for many centuries to come.

To overcome their cultural trauma, carrier groups for the Book of Daniel invented the character of Daniel in light of the story of Ahiqar, the best known for the exile community. Just as Ahiqar successfully overcame challenges in the court of the Assyrian empire, Daniel and his friends could overcome their crisis in the court of Nebuchadnezzar. Furthermore, by depicting Nebuchadnezzar as an incompetent monarch, the carrier groups intended to downgrade the Seleucid emperors. According to the Babylonian historian Berossus, the Seleucids regarded themselves as Nebuchadnezzar. The carrier groups' attempt to rewrite their own history could offer heuristic tools to overcome the exile community under the reign of the Seleucid emperors. In what follows, the article will discuss trauma studies, Jeffrey Alexander's cultural trauma and Jan Assmann's cultural memory. Then, the article demonstrates how the Babylonian exile served as transgenerational cultural trauma and how scribes as carrier groups reinterpreted their current trauma in the aftermath of Antiochus IV Epiphanes's devastating actions. Lastly, the article concludes with a discussion of how 'normative inversion' against the meta-narrative, the imperial domination by the Hellenistic rulers, was described in Daniel 1.

Method of trauma hermeneutics
Trauma studies for psychology and literature

Early trauma studies relied on individual psychological phenomena. In the late 19th century, many physicians researched traumatised patients after train accidents. One prominent physician, Jean Martin Charcot, who was Sigmund Freud's teacher and mentor, investigated the connection between trauma and psychopathology (Herman 1992:7–20). He suggested that symptoms such as unexplained paralysis,

amnesia and convulsions resulted from psychological phenomena rather than physical ones. Based on Charcot's analysis, Freud developed the concept of 'latency' after traumatic events, a period during which the effects of the experience are not apparent. In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud argues that the foundation of Hebraic monotheism relies on latency (Freud 1939:84). He asserts that Moses was an Egyptian follower of Aton. After the Israelites escaped from Egypt, they murdered Moses in the wilderness and abandoned the cult of Aton, the Egyptian Pharaoh Akhenaten's monotheistic God, which Moses brought. While they dwelt in Palestine, they adopted the volcanic God, Yahweh, who never challenged the other Gods. However, the Israelites' main deity, Yahweh, became very similar to Moses's God, Aton. Thus, Freud insists that the Jewish religion is governed by underlying forces of repression and return that portray trauma. Influenced by Freud's concept of 'latency', Cathy Caruth focused on the victim's unconsciousness and traumatic amnesia. She argues that 'the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it' (Caruth 1996:4). In particular, she emphasises that listening to survivors' literary works conveys their testimony, even if their works reflect the incomprehensibility of their initial experience. Caruth's influential literary approach to survivors' writings helped biblical scholars analyse traditions by considering experiences of trauma after the Babylonian exile. Nevertheless, her approach has been criticised because her psychoanalysis of texts is limited to the individual level.

Cultural trauma and cultural memory

Jeffrey Alexander has developed trauma studies while considering trauma at a collective level. Beyond Cathy Caruth's psychoanalytic insights into individual trauma, Alexander (2004) suggested cultural trauma as follows:

> Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways. As we develop it here, cultural trauma is first of all an empirical, scientific concept, suggesting new meaningful and causal relationships between previously unrelated events, structures, perceptions, and actions. But this new scientific concept also illuminates an emerging domain of social responsibility and political action. (p. 1)

For Alexander, since trauma is 'a socially mediated attribution', it requires the cultural process facilitated by the contingent skills of reflexive social agents (Alexander 2004:10). Alexander refers to these social agents as carrier groups. He argues that 'carrier groups may consist of elites, but they may also encompass denigrated and marginalised classes' (Alexander 2012:16). To reconstruct trauma in a society, carrier groups should create a new master narrative to explain a community's present trauma caused by a horrendous event. In particular, Alexander emphasises the role of carrier groups in 'meaning-making' within the public

sphere (Alexander 2004:11). The carrier groups have a responsibility to advocate for their traumatised society using four representations: (1) the nature of the pain, (2) the portrayal of the victim who was affected, (3) the connection of the trauma victim to the wider audience, and (4) the attribution of responsibility (Alexander 2012; Boase 2017; Holt 2014). For example, Ezekiel, as a Zadokite priest, was an elite in the sacred temple of Jerusalem before the Babylonian exile. However, in 597 BCE, Ezekiel became one of the captives by the Babylonians and was forced to migrate to Chebar in Babylon (Ezk 1:3). Ezekiel's new explanation for the Babylonian exiles, which differs from the Deuteronomistic narrative, evidently shows the carrier groups' new narrative for their community. In the case of Daniel, he is also depicted as one of the captives but educated in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar. Different from Ezekiel's tradition, Daniel's carrier groups must have not only reflected the period of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 167 BCE but also had the responsibility to interpret their social circumstances. By re-remembering their previous horrendous event by the Babylonian army in 587 BCE, they attempt to interpret the meaning-making of the persecution of the Jews under Antiochus IV Epiphanes.

The concept of cultural trauma is also closely related to Jan Assmann's theory of cultural memory. Influenced by the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, Assmann developed his theory. Halbwachs emphasises that 'regarding historical memory, a community member does not remember events directly, but can only be stimulated through reading or listening or in commemoration and festive occasions when people gather together to remember in common the deeds' (Halbwachs 1992:24). In other words, a community member cannot remember events without interaction with his or her social framework. The German Egyptologist Jan Assmann further developed Halbwachs' concept of collective memory. While Assmann introduces Halbwachs' collective memory as communicative memory (Assmann 2006:6), he emphasises the function of cultural memory, which is concerned 'not with factual but with remembered history' (Assmann 2006:37–38). He even asserts that 'cultural memory transforms factual into remembered history, thus turning it into myth' (Assmann 2006:38). Cultural memory can be formalised and transmitted through festivals. One concept within cultural memory is 'mythomotor'. According to Assmann, the 'mythomotor' in mythical form appears as a contra-present one in a particular situation, especially under foreign rule or oppression (Assmann 2006:63). To illustrate this, Assmann suggests that 'the Book of Daniel is the oldest example of a millenaristic form of contrapresent mythomotor, was written' in such a situation (Assmann 2006:64). Assmann's concept of 'mythomotor' can be explained through 'normative inversion'. He explains that 'normative inversion' is used for 'inverting the abominations of the other culture into obligations' (Assmann 1997:31). It is evident that the Book of Daniel depicts how the collective memory of the Jewish community's trauma in 587 BCE is

reinterpreted and how it becomes cultural memory under the reign of Antiochus IV.

Cultural trauma results from cultural memory through a societal process. Significantly, cultural trauma can be transmitted as transgenerational trauma. When Vamik Volkan introduces 'transgenerational transmission', he explains that an older generation unconsciously externalises their traumatic experience onto the identity of the next generation (Volkan 1999:43). The first generation of the Jewish community unconsciously transmitted their traumatic experience with Nebuchadnezzar to their descendants. When facing traumatic persecution by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, post-exilic writers as carrier groups had the responsibility to interpret their sufferings by recalling their ancestors' experiences as cultural memory. The combination of Alexander's cultural trauma and Assmann's cultural memory provides a methodology for understanding the trauma of Jewish communities under the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. In what follows, the article will analyse Daniel chapter one based on Alexander's cultural trauma and Assmann's cultural memory theories.

Cultural trauma and cultural memory in Daniel 1

The trauma caused by Antiochus IV Epiphanes's attack on Jerusalem

The brutal persecution[5] caused by the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 168–167 BCE left indelible scars on the cultural memory of the Jewish community. Contrary to the previous Seleucid kings' tolerant policies towards the Jews, Antiochus IV extensively prohibited Jewish religious traditions and mandated adherence to Hellenistic customs (1 Macc 1:41–52). Initially, Antiochus IV did not enforce Hellenisation upon the Jews. However, two significant events precipitated Hellenisation and his persecution of the Jewish population. Firstly, Jason purchased the high priesthood, promising to Hellenise Jerusalem. In 175 BCE, Onias III received support from the Ptolemaic dynasty. In light of these political circumstances, Jason offered Antiochus IV 360 talents of silver, along with an additional 80 talents from another source. He also proposed the establishment of Greek institutions such as the gymnasium and the ephēbeia (2 Macc 4:9). Despite briefly holding the high priesthood with Antiochus IV's support, Jason faced betrayal from his messenger, Menelaus, who promised Antiochus IV 300 talents more than Jason had initially offered. To fulfil this promise, Menelaus resorted to plundering the temple treasury and vessels and even plotted the assassination of Onias III. Secondly, Jason's revolt in Jerusalem provoked Antiochus IV's persecution of the Jewish community. Amid Antiochus IV's second attack on Egypt, a rumour of his death spread in Jerusalem. Upon hearing this, Jason gathered over a thousand men to attack Jerusalem (2 Macc 5). Antiochus IV, unable to conquer Egypt because of Roman intervention,

5. His persecution is known as the Gezerot (evil decrees) of Antiochus. See Tcherikover (1959:175).

learned of Jason's revolt. Consequently, in 167 BCE, he ordered the massacre of Jerusalem, resulting in the loss of 80 000 lives and the enslavement of many. He even prohibited the practice of Jewish ancestral laws and dedicated the temple in Jerusalem to the Greek God Zeus (2 Macc 6:1–2).

Although the horrifying persecution did not bring individual trauma for all Jews, it obviously motivated the initiation of carrier groups for the process of cultural trauma. It is assumed that carrier groups such as the *maskilim* [wise teachers] (Daniel 11:33 -35) and the *Hasidim* [pious ones] (1 Macc 2:42; 7:13) for the Book of Daniel attempted to interpret the cultural trauma. Antiochus IV's horrendous persecution reminded them of their previous archenemy, the Neo-Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BCE.

Image of Antiochus IV behind Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 1

The cultural trauma caused by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BCE reappeared as a latency for Jews after the persecution of Antiochus IV in 167 BCE. Biblical authors preserved traditions regarding the sacking of Jerusalem and the plundering of the temple in 587 BCE (2 Ki 24–25; Jr 39; 2 Chr 36). Daniel begins with a brief explanation of Nebuchadnezzar's invasion and his forced migration of the Jewish nobles in Daniel 1:1–5. Then, Daniel concludes with the triumph of Daniel and his friends in the Babylonian court in Daniel 1:6–19 in detail. It seems that Daniel focuses more on how to survive and succeed during the exile rather than describing the massacre and trauma by Nebuchadnezzar. For this reason, most scholars insist that Daniel takes little interest in the massacres in the temple of Jerusalem (Henze 2009:108–120). Following Humphreys' argument, Matthias Henze argues that 'the lives of the deportees were not nearly as bad as the Deuteronomistic account of the fall of Jerusalem would have led us to believe, at least not for all of them' (Henze 2009:117). However, behind Daniel and his friends' successful life in chapter one, the final author of Daniel not only obliquely criticises Antiochus IV but also provides Jews with 'normative inversion'.

In the first part of Daniel 1 (vv. 1–7), the narrative, when read against the backdrop of Antiochus IV's persecution, attributes to Nebuchadnezzar two strategies that intentionally echo Seleucid policies: (1) the plundering of temple vessels and (2) the imposition of an assimilationist education on the Judean elite. While the latter is historically anachronistic for the 6th century BCE, it functions as a deliberate act of cultural memory, projecting the Seleucid programme of Hellenisation back into a Babylonian setting. Firstly, the author criticises the plundering of vessels by Menelaus and Antiochus IV. Most scholars have doubts about Daniel's information regarding Nebuchadnezzar's invasion in the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim in 605 BCE. Nebuchadnezzar was not a king before the battle of Carchemish in 605 BCE. Furthermore, there is no crucial evidence to support a Babylonian siege of Jerusalem before the first fall of Jerusalem

and Jehoiachin's deportation in 597 BCE. The cultural memory for the Jews does not require the accuracy of historical information. Rather, it preserves the remembered memory via the social process of the community:

> 1 In the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.
> 2 The LORD gave King Jehoiakim of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God, which he brought to the land of Shinar, to the house of his gods, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his gods (Dan 1:1–2 [*Author's own translation*]).

The carrier groups in the Book of Daniel propose their new theology for their community: God is guiding world history through Nebuchadnezzar's invasion. In 2 Kings 24–25, the Deuteronomist interprets the fall of Jerusalem as a consequence of the sin of King Menasseh (2 Ki 24:3–4). Jeremiah expands the theology from an individual monarch's sin to the sins of the Jewish community (Jr 40:3). On the other hand, in Daniel 1:2, for the post-exilic reader, the carrier groups focus on God's plan rather than the sins of the Jewish community. It is God who delivers Jehoiakim of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar and even allows the vessels of the House of God to be placed in the treasure house of Nebuchadnezzar's Gods. The carrier groups' next main concern is the 'plundered vessels' by Nebuchadnezzar. Most scholars assume that Daniel's concern for the 'plundered vessels' originates from the Chronicler's tradition (2 Chr 36:7) (Smith-Christopher 1996:39). It is significant that the Hebrew noun *kēlî* occurs three times, twice in Daniel 1:2 and once in Daniel 11:8 regarding Antiochus IV's plundering of vessels. The mention of 'vessels' reminds us of the actions of Menelaus and Antiochus IV. Menelaus plundered sacred vessels from the temple to pay his bribe to Antiochus IV (2 Macc 4:32). Antiochus IV, in his arrogance, took the holy vessels with his polluted hands as a form of indemnity for the Roman Empire (2 Macc 5:16). The carrier groups attempt to interpret God's sovereignty behind the plundering of vessels. Furthermore, by adding 'the land of Shinar', which symbolises human hubris through the tower of Babel (Gn 11:2), the carrier groups also sought to criticise Antiochus IV's hubris.

Then, why did the carrier groups choose Nebuchadnezzar? For the Hellenistic reader, Nebuchadnezzar symbolised the image of the Seleucid emperors. According to Johannes Haubold's analysis of the Babylonian historian Berossus in the first half of the 3rd century BCE, Nebuchadnezzar was the Seleucids' favourite Babylonian ruler (Haubold 2022:78). In a similar vein, the author of the book of Judith introduced the fictional figure of the Assyrian King Nebuchadnezzar to criticise the threat of the Seleucid emperor.[6] Perhaps, Daniel's carrier groups attempted to rewrite their own history to criticise Antiochus IV behind the image of Nebuchadnezzar.

Secondly, Daniel's carrier groups introduce the imposition of an assimilationist education on the Judean elite under the reign of Antiochus IV in Daniel 1:3–7. In verses 3–5, Nebuchadnezzar ordered Ashepenaz, his chief officer, to bring the youths from the royal family and nobles and thus teach them the language and literature of the Chaldeans and even provide them with a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. In verses 6–7, Ashepenaz changed the Jewish names of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah into Babylonian names (Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego).[7] Audiences under the reign of the Seleucids must have been reminded of the Seleucids' interest in Chaldean literature. According to Newsom, 'Chaldean astrological and divinatory knowledge enjoyed a high degree of cultural prestige throughout the Persian and Hellenistic periods' (Newsom 2014:45). To illustrate this, she introduces that 'both Alexander the Great and Seleucid kings consulted Chaldean experts (Diodorus Siculus 17.112–14; frg. 21)' (Newsom 2014:45). Furthermore, the imperial education of the dominant for the dominated also reminded audiences of Jason's Hellenisation of the Jewish elites in Jerusalem through the gymnasium and the ephēbeia.

The carrier groups evidently emphasise that such Hellenisation for Jews would ultimately fail. Daniel and his friends, identified by their Babylonian names, no longer appear in the latter part of Daniel chapter one. Only their Jewish names reappear in verse 11 and verse 19. The main concern of the carrier groups against Antiochus IV is their resistance to the resources from the king's table. The Hebrew noun, *pat-bag ha-melekh*, a Persian loanword (Old Persian patibaga means food or provisions), translated as 'king's food', occurs exclusively in the Book of Daniel six times (Dn 1:5, 8, 13, 15, 16 and 11:26). The king's food in chapter one overshadows the demise of the Seleucid emperor by those who eat the king's food in Daniel 11:26. In general, it is regarded that Daniel's refusal is rooted in the dietary laws in Leviticus 11 and 17:10–14. However, as Quick and Lyell point out, Daniel's refusal to partake in the king's favoured diet was 'clearly an important one in the Second Temple' (Quick & Lyell 2022:10). In particular, the book of Judith, one of the Hasmonean texts, describes Judith's refusal to eat the food provided by Nebuchadnezzar. Similarly, by refusing to eat the king's food, Daniel and his friends express their resistance against Antiochus IV's Hellenisation of Jews. This understanding is consistent with Kratz's observation that the concept of the *Väterliche Gesetze* [ancestral laws] in Jewish tradition, closely aligned with the Mosaic Torah, played a decisive role in sustaining communal identity under foreign domination. In the Maccabean crisis, Antiochus IV's suppression of sacrificial worship, food laws and Sabbath observance directly attacked these ancestral laws. Within this framework, the refusal in Daniel 1 to partake of the royal food is not merely a matter of dietary

6. Most scholars agree that the book of Judith was composed during the Maccabean period. See Wills (2019:8).

7. Daniel means 'God is my judge'. Hananiah means 'YHWH is gracious'. Mishael means 'Who is what God is?' Azariah means 'YHWH has helped'. Their Babylonian names include Babylonian theophoric elements: Belteshazzar means 'Bel, Marduk's alternative name, protect the king!' Shadrach is from 'Sudur-Aku, command of the Babylonian moon god Aku'. Meshach means 'Who is as Aku is?' Abednego means 'servant of the Babylonian god of literacy, Nabu'.

preference but a symbolic act of Torah loyalty [*Toratreue*], representing a form of non-violent resistance alongside, yet distinct from, the martyrdom narratives of the period (Kratz 2024a, 2024b:44–48).

Normative inversion: Revolution by the dominated against the dominant

Most scholars agree that the court tales in Daniel 1–6 are a revision of the story of Ahiqar, which circulated as the Aramaic version in the post-exilic period (Holm 2013:1–4). In the story of Ahiqar, he serves as a minister for the Assyrian king Sennacherib. Ahiqar adopts his nephew Nadin as his son and recommends him to take over his position when Sennacherib's son, Esarhaddon, becomes king. Ahiqar even hopes to exploit the king's favour upon his retirement. However, Nadin accuses Ahiqar of plotting against Esarhaddon. Esarhaddon orders his army officer, Nabusumiskun, to murder Ahiqar. Despite this, with Nabusumiskun's help, Ahiqar survives and demonstrates his wisdom before the Egyptian king (Ginsberg 1969: 427–430). In the latter part (vv. 8–21) of Daniel chapter one, on the surface, it appears that Daniel's plot follows the story of Ahiqar. However, Daniel's carrier groups revised the Ahiqar story to fit their circumstances and suggested their normative inversion with two perspectives: (1) the maintenance of Jewish identity, and (2) the revolution by the dominated against the dominant.

Firstly, Daniel's carrier groups emphasise the maintenance of Jewish identity. While the story of Ahiqar never depicts Ahiqar disobeying the Assyrian king Esarhaddon, Daniel refuses the king's food and even asserts that it defiles him:

> 8 and Daniel put upon his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's food and the wine of his drink and he sought the chief officer that he would not defile himself. (Dan 1:8 [*Author's own translation*])

Daniel's refusal to eat the king's food must have reminded the Jewish community of the martyrdom of the Judean elder Eleazar, a highly respected teacher of the Torah. In 2 Maccabees 6:18–31, Antiochus IV's soldiers forced Eleazar to eat pork, but he refused, choosing death instead. He believed that eating pork would compromise the authority of God and legitimise the authority of Antiochus IV. Eleazar's final testimony evokes Daniel's decision:

> 25 If I pretended to eat this meat, just to live a little while longer, it would bring shame and disgrace on me and lead many young people astray.
>
> 26 For the present I might be able to escape what you could do to me, but whether I live or die, I cannot escape Almighty God. (2 Maccabees 6:25–26)

Then, why did Daniel's carrier groups choose to eat vegetables and water for 10 days in Daniel 1:12? The Hebrew noun *zērōʿîm*, translated as 'vegetables', originates from the Hebrew noun *zēraʿ*, which means 'seed'. Recently, Michael Seufert suggests that the vegetable tradition echoes God's providence in the wilderness in Exodus 15–16 (Seufert 2019:644–660). In the episode of Exodus 15–16, Yahweh tests the Israelites with food and water and provides them with Manna. Since the Manna is described as 'a seed-like substance', Seufert insists that the vegetables in Daniel 1 allude to the wilderness tradition and thus enable Daniel's community to remember God's providence during the period of exile (Seufert 2019:660). Daniel's choice of a vegetable diet not only evokes God's protection for the Jewish community in the wilderness but also serves as resistance against Antiochus IV's Hellenisation. In this respect, Shane Kirkpatrick argues that:

> 'Daniel 1 serves not only to compare the Judean tradition with a foreign, dominating tradition in order to demonstrate the superiority of the former, but the chapter also serves thereby to encourage Judean readers to maintain their identity and their loyalty to the Judean heritage and the Judean God' (Kirkpatrick 2005:60).

This suggests that Daniel's choice of vegetables must have functioned as normative inversion for the dominated against Antiochus IV's hegemony.

Secondly, Daniel's carrier groups point out that the revolution by the dominated against the dominant could break the system of the Seleucids. In verses 9–10, although Daniel received favour and compassion from Ashepenaz because of God's support, he failed to persuade him. Nevertheless, Ashepenaz's testimony echoes the edict of Antiochus IV, stating that disobedience by the dominated cannot avoid the king's violence (1 Macc 1:41–50). However, ultimately, the guard whom Ashepenaz appointed over Daniel and his friends allows Daniel's refusal of the king's table. Daniel's triumph could not have been accomplished without the support of the anonymous guard. The anonymous guard's decision could provide a chance to break the system of the Seleucids. In other words, the process to break Hellenistic hegemony begins with the persuasion of the lowest rank of the Hellenistic dynasty.

Conclusion

In this article, trauma theories have been applied to understand the cultural trauma and memory in Daniel chapter one. Beyond previous scholars' analyses of the first generation of the Babylonian exile, this study focused on the post-exilic author Daniel's cultural trauma under the persecution of Antiochus IV in 167 BCE. After Antiochus IV's devastation of the temple of Jerusalem, the carrier groups for the Book of Daniel must have had the responsibility to interpret the horrendous event by the emperor. The catastrophe by the emperor reminded the Jews of their unforgettable devastation by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BCE. As Jan Assmann points out, their collective memory does not emphasise historical accuracy but strengthens God's plan behind Nebuchadnezzar's invasion. The collective memory reappeared as a form of latency during the persecution of Antiochus IV in 167 BCE. As the Babylonian historian Berossus described, the Seleucids regarded themselves as Nebuchadnezzar, and the carrier groups introduced Antiochus IV's invasion behind the image

of Nebuchadnezzar. Then, they suggest their new normative inversion for their community: the maintenance of their Jewish tradition against Hellenised education and dietary practices and the revolution by the dominated against the dominant. The contrast between Eleazar's martyrdom in 2 Maccabees 6 and Daniel's survival through dietary resistance is significant. Whereas Eleazar's refusal leads to death as a testimony of fidelity, Daniel's strategy models a form of faithful endurance that preserves life under foreign domination. Together, these two narratives offer complementary modes of resisting imperial power – one through ultimate sacrifice, the other through adaptive resilience. Above all, the carrier groups strongly express that God controls world history and ultimately protects his people.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

Author's contribution

I.Y is the sole author of this research article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

Data availability

Data sharing does not apply to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author or that of the publisher. The author is responsible for this article's results, findings and content.

References

Alexander, J.C., 2004, 'Toward a theory of cultural trauma', in J.C. Alexander, R. Eyerman, B. Giesen, N.J. Smelser & P. Sztompka (eds.), *Cultural trauma and collective identity*, pp. 1–30, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.

Alexander, J.C., 2012, *Trauma: A social theory*, Polity Press, Malden, MA.

Assmann, J., 1997, *Moses the Egyptian: The memory of Egypt in western monotheism*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

Assmann, J., 2006, *Religion and cultural memory*, Stanford University Press, Stanford.

Boase, E., 2017, 'Fragmented voices: Collective identity and traumatization in lamentations', in E. Boase & C.G. Frechette (eds.), *Bible through the lens of trauma*, pp. 49–66, Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) Press, Atlanta, GA.

Caruth, C., 1996, *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative, and history*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD.

Collins, J.J., 1993, *Daniel: A commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Hermeneia, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN.

Collins, J.J., 2001, 'Current issues in the study of Daniel', in J.J. Collins & P.W. Flint (eds.), *The Book of Daniel: Composition and reception*, vol. 1, pp. 1–39, Vetus Testamentum Supplements 83, Brill, Leiden.

Freud, S., 1939, *Moses and Monotheism*, transl. K. Jones, Vintage, New York, NY.

Ginsberg, H.L., 1969, 'Aramaic Proverbs and Precepts: The Words of Ahiqar,' in J.B. Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament,* 3rd edn., pp. 427–430, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

Halbwachs, M., 1992, *On collective memory*, transl. L.A. Coser, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.

Han, J.H., 2008, *Daniel's Spiel: Apocalyptic literacy in the Book of Daniel*, University Press of America, Lanham, MD.

Haubold, J., 2022, 'Memory and resistance in the Seleucid World: The case of Babylon', in P.J. Kosmin & I.S. Moyer (eds.), *Cultures of resistance in the Hellenistic East*, pp. 63–85, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Henze, M., 2009, 'Babylon remembered: Nebuchadnezzar in the collective memory of ancient Israel', in K.D. Dobos & M. Köszeghy (eds.), *With wisdom as a robe: Qumran and other Jewish studies in honour of Ida Fröhlich*, pp. 108–120, Sheffield Phoenix Press, Sheffield.

Herman, J.L., 1992, *Trauma and recovery*, BasicBooks, New York, NY.

Holm, T.L., 2013, *Of courtiers and Kings: The Biblical Daniel narratives and ancient story-collections*, 1 online resource, 592 p, vols. EANEC 1, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, IN.

Holt, E.K., 2014, 'Daughter Zion: Trauma, cultural memory and gender in OT poetics', in E.-M. Becker, J. Dochhorn & E.K. Holt (eds.), *Trauma and traumatization in individual and collective dimensions: Insights from Biblical studies and beyond*, pp. 162–176, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen.

Humphreys, L., 1973, 'A life-style for diaspora: A study of the tales of Esther and Daniel', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92(2), 211–223. https://doi.org/10.2307/3262954

Janzen, D., 2012, *The violent gift: Trauma's subversion of the Deuteronomistic history's narrative*, T & T Clark International, New York, NY.

Kelle, B.E., 2009, 'Dealing with the trauma of defeat: The rhetoric of the devastation and rejuvenation of nature in Ezekiel', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128(3), 469–490. https://doi.org/10.2307/25610197

Kirkpatrick, S., 2005, *Competing for honor: A social-scientific reading of Daniel 1–6*, Brill, Leiden.

Kratz, R.G., 2001, 'The visions of Daniel', in J.J. Collins & P.W. Flint (eds.), The Book of Daniel: Composition and reception, vol. 1, pp. 91–113, Vetus Testamentum Supplements 83, Brill, Leiden.

Kratz, R.G., 2024a, 'Antiochus IV's persecution as portrayed in the Book of Daniel', TheTorah.com, viewed n.d., from https://www.thetorah.com/article/antiochus-iv-persecution-as-portrayed-in-the-book-of-daniel.

Kratz, R.G., 2024b, *Väterliche Gesetze und das Gesetz des Mose* [Ancestral Laws and the Law of Moses], Tria Corda 16, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen.

Markl, D., 2020, 'The Babylonian Exile as the birth trauma of Monotheism', *Biblica* 101(1), 1–25.

Newsom, C.A., 2014, *Daniel: A Commentary*, OTL, Westminster John Knox, Louisville, KY.

O'Connor, K.M., 2011, *Jeremiah: Pain and promise*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN.

Portier-Young, A., 2011, *Apocalypse against empire: Theologies of resistance in Early Judaism*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.

Quick, L. & Ellena, L., 2022, 'Dressing Daniel: Identity formation and embodiment in Daniel 1–6', *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 13(1), 1–26. https://doi.org/10.30965/21967954-bja10019

Seufert, M., 2019, 'Refusing the King's portion: A reexamination of Daniel's dietary reaction in Daniel 1', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 43(4), 644–660. https://doi.org/10.1177/0309089218821310

Smith-Christopher, D.L., 1996, *The Book of Daniel*, vol. 7, NIB, Abingdon, Nashville, TN.

Sweeney, M.A., 2012, *Tanak: A theological and critical introduction to the Jewish Bible*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN.

Tcherikover, V., 1959, *Hellenistic civilization and the Jews*, Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, PA.

Valeta,.M., 2005, 'Court or Jester tales?: Resistance and social reality in Daniel 1–6', *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 32(3), 309–324.

Volkan, V.D., 1999, *Blood lines: From ethnic pride to ethnic terrorism*, Westview Press, Boulder, CO.

Wills, L.M., 2019, *Judith: A Commentary on the Book of Judith*, Hermeneia, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN.

Yang, I., 2025, 'Rereading Daniel 1 through the lens of Trauma', in Unpublished conference paper presented at the 2025 SBL and EABS International Meeting, June 26, Uppsala, Sweden.