Daniel Dragonslayer – Bel and the dragon, Verses 23–27 (OG/Th)

Author:
Joseph J. de Bruyn[1]

Affiliation:
[1]Faculty of Theology, North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, South Africa

Correspondence to:
Joseph de Bruyn

Email:
jjdebruyn@ymail.com

Postal address:
Private Bag X1288, Potchefstroom 2520, South Africa

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In this article, aspects of narrative critique, genre, editorial critique, the body and space are uniquely combined into a body-space framework. This spatial framework is used to examine the second episode of 'Bel and the Dragon', called 'Daniel Dragonslayer'. It is postulated that the second episode of 'Bel and the Dragon' should be read in a reciprocal relationship with not only 'Bel and the Dragon', but also the larger Book of Daniel. Firstly, such an analysis indicates that the smaller episode is part of a larger clash of deities. Secondly, it shows that the editor / author utilises the episode to create a new cosmology. In this new cosmology, the Jewish deity is an almighty one, whilst other deities are seen as false and not real living gods. In his own way, the editor or author contributes to the way in which Jews regarded their God within the reality of the diaspora.

Daniel Dragonslayer – Bel en die draak, Verse 23–27 (VAN/Die). In hierdie artikel word aspekte van narratiewe-kritiek, genre, redaksie-kritiek, die liggaam en ruimte op 'n unieke wyse gekombineer om 'n beliggaamde ruimteraamwerk te vorm. Hierdie beliggaamde ruimteraamwerk word gebruik om die tweede episode van 'Bel en die Draak', naamlik 'Daniël, die Draakjagter', te analiseer. Die artikel stel voor dat hierdie tweede episode van 'Bel en die Draak' in 'n resiproke verhouding met 'Bel en die Draak', sowel as met die boek Daniël gelees moet word. Indien die teks op hierdie voorgestelde wyse ontleed word, kom verskeie punte na vore. Eerstens word aangedui dat die kleiner episode deel van 'n groter gode-oorlog vorm. Tweedens, die skrywer/redakteur gebruik die kleiner episode as deel van 'n proses om 'n nuwe kosmologie te skep. Volgens hierdie nuwe kosmologie is die Joodse God 'n almagtige God, terwyl ander gode vals en nie ware lewende gode is nie. Op sy eie manier lewer die skrywer/redakteur 'n bydrae tot die ontwikkeling van die Jode se godsbeskouing tydens die diaspora.

Introduction

However, the roots to the dragon-slaying motif in both the New Testament and early Christian tradition can be traced back even further to the apocryphal story of *Daniel Dragonslayer*.

Daniel dragonslayer: An overview

Daniel Dragonslayer[1] is a story about the character Daniel[2] who slays a sacred δράκων [dragon or serpent] worshiped by the Babylonians. In itself, this short story actually forms part of the narrative known as *Bel and the Dragon*.[3] In its Greek form, *Bel and the Dragon* dates back to 100 BCE. Its Hebrew *vorlage* may even be older (Charles 2004:655). The narrative is included in the Septuagint (LXX) as the 14th chapter of the *Greek Daniel*.[4] Altogether, *Bel and the Dragon* consists of three episodes or short stories interwoven into a single narrative. In this single narrative called *Bel and the Dragon*, *Daniel Dragonslayer* forms the second episode. It is this second episode that is being investigated in this article. The first episode can be described as *The disempowerment of Bel*. In the third episode the story of *Daniel in the lion's den* is recounted.

Two Greek versions of *Bel and the Dragon* exist. The same is thus true with regard to the episode this article refers to as *Daniel Dragonslayer* (v. 23–27). The oldest version of the narrative is that of the LXX and is often called the Old Greek (OG) version. The later version is that of

1. *Daniel Dragonslayer* is used as a description of verses 23–27 of the narrative *Bel and the Dragon*.
2. For a better distinction, *Daniel* in italics is used to indicate the *Book of Daniel*. 'Daniel' in normal script is used in reference to the character Daniel.
3. *Bel and the Dragon* in italics refers to a narrative. 'Bel' and 'dragon' in normal script indicates a specific deity or a sacred animal respectively.
4. *Greek Daniel* in italics refers to the LXX and Theodotion versions of *Daniel*. *Hebrew Daniel* is used in reference to the *Book of Daniel* as it is found in the *Hebrew Bible* (Old Testament or T'n'ch). *Bel and the Dragon* can also be referred to as 'chapter 14' of the *Book of Daniel*.

Theodotion (Th), dating from the 2nd century (Nickelsburg 2005:24–26; Charles 2004:656). Th is also considered to be the more elaborate of the two versions. Therefore, this article mostly uses Th, but references to OG will be made where necessary.

In both OG and Th, *Bel and the Dragon* consists of 42 verses. Each of its smaller episodes is made up of corresponding verses in both OG and Th. Thus, in both OG and Th, *Daniel Dragonslayer* is narrated in verses 23 to 27. Likewise, episode 1 is told in verses 1 to 22 and episode 3 in verses 28 to 42 in both Greek versions.

The research in this article is part of a larger investigation into the utilisation of body, space, narrative and genre by the Greek editor or author[5] of *Bel and the Dragon*. Two articles have already been written on the subject.[6] The first article (De Bruyn & Jordaan 2014) was designed to identify lacunae in previous research on *Bel and the Dragon*, whilst the second article[7] focused on episode 1.

Past research, new insights

In previous research done on Daniel Dragonslayer, commentaries tend to echo each other in following the well-travelled road. Few scholars, if any, try to incorporate insights from new developments in language and text studies. Usually scholars focus on *Bel and the Dragon* as a complete, but freestanding narrative. Almost no attention is given to the individual episodes of *Bel and the Dragon*. The editorial function of *Bel and the Dragon* as Daniel 14 in the *Greek Daniel* is also not considered.

A brief summary of past research follows:

- The narrative's polemic use against idolatry (Jones 2003:24–26; DeSilva 2002:239) with the theme: 'Who is the living God?' (Nickelsburg 2005:24–26). New insights into how authors' use of space in narratives, make it possible to examine this theme more thoroughly and elaborately than before.
- The investigation of the intertextual relationship between *Bel and the Dragon* and Isaiah 44–46 and Jeremiah 51 (Nickelsburg 2005:24–26; DeSilva 2002:240).
- Comparison of differences in the narrative between the OG and Th as well as the history of these two text versions (Van der Bergh 2009; Jones 2003:139–140; Di Lella 2001; Collins 1993:237–256).
- The themes of humour and irony in the narrative (Nickelsburg 2005:24–26; Gruen 1998:137, 167–187; Smith-Christopher 1996).
- The relationship between the court tales of Daniel 1–6 and *Bel and the Dragon* (Collins 1993:405–419).
- The theme of food in the sense of 'eating' and 'not eating' as a motif in the narrative (Bergmann 2004). Again, the study of space and the creative properties of language, make it possible to read the use of food as a spatial marker whereby different god-spaces can be identified.
- Much research has been done on the place and date of origin of *Bel and the Dragon* and its different text versions (Nickelsburg 2005:24–26; Charles 2004:656; DeSilva 2002:240; Greun 1998:168–170). For the episode *Daniel Dragonslayer*, an Egyptian origin was considered in the past (Charles 2004:653–656), but a Babylonian origin cannot be ruled out. Scholars tried to connect the worshipping of the δράκων in the story to the worship of different snake-like deities in the Ancient Near East. Collins (1993:414–415) is correct in his view that, connecting the episode to a specific deity or place of origin, does not change the message of the story as a polemic against foreign religious practices. Accordingly, this article focuses on the episode as part of the larger narrative of the *Greek Daniel*.
- The similarities and dissimilarities between OG and Th as well as *Hebrew Daniel* and its Greek versions (Jones 2003:139–140). Although this research has brought insight into the origins of the story, scholars tend to lose track of the narrative as a whole and its function.
- The original language of *Bel and the Dragon* (Charles 2004:655).
- The tolerance of the king towards Daniel and his God (Collins 1993:335–345).
- The character of Daniel as a weapon of attack and defence through the ages (Jordaan 2008). If this theme is combined with a spatial framework, it is possible to indicate that the editor or author utilises Daniel not only as a weapon, but also as a vessel of the God of Israel.

Due to the works of cognitive linguists such as Evens, Bergen, Zinken, Lakoff, Croft and Cruse as well as Foucault's[8] work on narratives, new themes such as body, space and narrative structures have emerged in language studies. The scholars who did research on space and body in Daniel are few. Nel (2014) and Venter (2006; 2004) wrote on space in Daniel 1 and 9, but not on space in *Bel and the Dragon*. Van der Bergh (2009), on the other hand, regarded the differences in location in the story of *Bel and the Dragon*. These scholars did valuable work, but none of them considered the possibility of combining space with the creative properties of language. Consequently, the possibility that the editor or author utilised space as a mechanism to create realities was not considered.

Some scholars such as Ogden (2013:2–4, 384–417), postulate a connection between the episode of *Daniel Dragonslayer* and biblical texts like Psalm 74:12–15, Isaiah 27:1, Acts 28:3–6 and Revelations 12–13. All of these texts have an underlying dragon-slaying motif. In one way or another, these texts describe the God of Israel slaying or battling a mythological serpent. This article analyses the dragon-slaying motif as part

5.Due to the complex origin of *Bel and the Dragon*, and the possibility of different narrators, authors and editors working on the text, the term *editor orauthor* is used to indicate the person, persons or school responsible for the creation of the *Greek Daniel*.

6.This series of articles is part of a Masters dissertation under the supervision of prof. Pierre Jordaan of the NWU, Potchefstroom-Campus.

7.'Constructing a deceitful deity. The disempowerment of Bel – *Bel and the Dragon*, verses 1–22 (OG/Th)', forthcoming.

8.The details of these scholars' work are given as the article progresses.

of the mythological nature of the apocalyptic genre, that is as part of a cosmological struggle between good and evil.

This article aims to investigate the following:

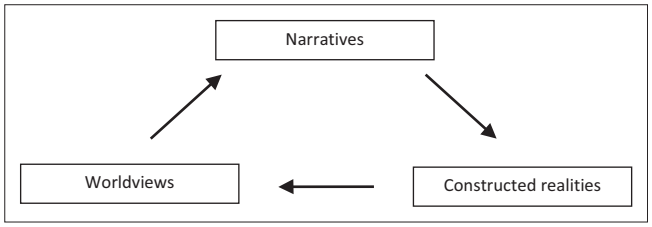
- Aspects of narrative critique are combined with the creative properties of language. No commentary as far as could be established, has previously considered this possibility.
- Space and body are regarded as markers utilised by the editor or author to create specific realities.
- The narrative itself is read as a mechanism to create a new identity of the living God and Jewish believers within the reality of the diaspora.
- *Daniel Dragonslayer* (episode 2, v. 23–27) is placed within a reciprocal relationship with not only *Bel and the Dragon*, but also the rest of *Daniel*. The function of the episode within the larger *Daniel* narrative is thus also considered.
- The episode is read against the apocalyptic genre for which *Daniel* is known.
- Narratives are regarded as structural units demarcated by spatial markers.
- *Daniel Dragonslayer* is treated as a short episode within a narrative about a clash of deities.

Theory and method

This article combines aspects of narrative critique, genre, body and space into a body-space framework.

Creative properties of language, narratives and genre

Language has the ability to not only reflect realities, but also construct realities (Evans & Green 2006:179, 190–243). In turn, language itself is constructed by words as products of the human mind. Everyday humans experience life in the form of different realities. During the week kids go to school, cars are driven in a specific way, whilst detailed time periods mark the passing of the day. Again, in turn, these different realities exist as structured narratives. Whether these structured narratives are laws or worldviews, they not only help humans to make sense of the world, but also to create civilised societies. Because of their different cultural experiences of the world, communities may structure their societies differently. In a sense, each society makes the world its own by telling their own narratives and thus creating their own worldviews. Thus, there is a link between narratives, worldviews and the creative properties of language (see Figure 1 below).



Source: Author's own construction

FIGURE 1: The ongoing process of creating worldviews, realities and narratives.

From another angle, this link between narratives, worldviews and language can also be explained in that all of life is a narrative (Lakoff 2008:21–93). Narratives have power – not only to reflect realities, but also to create realities and to hide opposing 'truths'. Narratives are structures of the brain and when they are written on paper or voiced, language is used to construct them. Words are the building blocks of narratives and thus have the ability to create framesets in people's minds through the narratives they structured. To the ancient people their worldviews were real – it was the way the world functioned. The same is true of worldviews today. For people their beliefs are real. On an almost daily basis, cunning politicians use the link between narratives, constructed realities and worldviews to influence the way people think. Narratives about weapons of mass destruction, for example, are created and used to legitimise the invasion of a foreign country. At the same time, it hides the truth about a country's desire for more oil. Depending on the narrative, people believe they either sympathise with Russia's annexation of Crimea[9] or oppose it.

The same is true of the editor or author of the *Book of Daniel*. He created his book as well as the episode of *Daniel Dragonslayer* to influence the way the people of his time thought about their world. With his narrative, he creates a new reality about the God of Israel that challenged the popular view of the gentile world.

Daniel Dragonslayer is first and foremost a narrative episode within a larger narrative called *Bel and the Dragon*. However, insights from *Redaktionsgeschichte* show that both *Bel and the Dragon* and *Daniel Dragonslayer* were utilised to create *Greek Daniel* (Becker 2005:8–9, 77). Each chapter of *Greek Daniel* were strategically placed to create the larger *Daniel narrative*.[10] Therefore, it is important to recognise that each chapter of *Daniel* as well as each episode of *Bel and the Dragon* has a reciprocal relationship.

The editor or author sets his narrative within the apocalyptic genre (Clifford 2003; Collins 2000:157; Redditt 1999:13). Apocalypticism reflects a unique worldview of which certain aspects are found in *Daniel*. These features are the dualistic distinction between a physical world and a spirit world, an eschatological deity war between good and evil and life after death. Elements of wisdom, prophecy and mythology are combined into one unique genre. As an apocalyptic narrative, *Daniel* wants to place the suffering of the Jewish people within the perspective of a larger clash of deities. The editor or author comments on a power struggle that he and his people experienced. The Jews should understand that their suffering is due to a cosmic struggle between their God and false gods. However, in the final days (ἔσχατος; cf. Dn 10:14 to the end of Dn 12) evil is vanquished and God emerges as the victor.

9.Crimea was annexed by Russia on the 18th of March 2014 after the majority of Crimea's people declared via a referendum that they wanted to be part of the Russian Federation.

10.This is true of both *Greek* and *Hebrew Daniel*.

The power struggle between the God of Israel and the deities of the gentile world can be described as a struggle between a *dominant narrative* and a *challenging narrative* (Foucault 1979:113; 1980; 1984a:202). The dominant narrative of the Ancient Near Eastern world could be described as follows:

Ancient Near Eastern people believed that each nation had its own deities and that those gods were confined within the boundaries of the people who worshiped them. Nations called upon their gods to protect them and to give them victory in times of war. It was believed that, as nations engaged in war, their gods also engaged in the fighting. Supposedly, the nation with the strongest gods won the war. The loser's gods became subordinate to the victor's, whilst their earthly territories became part of the winning deity's powerbase (cf. Walton 2006:97–102; Murphy 2002:159). As a result of this worldview, the God of Israel was defeated by the Babylonian gods at the time of the exile. Consequently, the gentile world saw the God of Israel as a degraded deity without real power. During the diaspora this worldview created a crisis for the Jews. During the Second Temple Period, Jews were continuously challenged to reconsider their belief system (cf. Ps 137; Is 40).

The body

Authors built and/or composed narratives around bodies in the form of characters (Foucault 1984b; 1984c:179–187). However, worldviews and opinions are nothing but narratives created within the human body (Lakoff 2008: 21, 93). Humans use their bodies in different ways (De Bruyn 2014; Lakoff 2008:27; Lakoff & Johnson 1999:555–557), viz. to:

- interact with the world around them and to experience it
- conceptualise and form worldviews or cosmologies and opinions
- construct different spaces and words (through bodily experience), which in turn establish frameworks
- function as a space or vessel in itself where specific concepts or experiences may be embodied
- comprehend events in the world in relation to what human bodies can or cannot do.

In the episode of *Daniel Dragonslayer*, there are the bodies of the gentile king, a δράκων and Daniel. In short, there are heroes and villains, a king and his subjects, protagonists and antagonists as well as deities and humans. These bodies are used to construct a worldview where the δράκων is worshiped as a living god. Two opposing narratives or realities are thus formed: one about the gods of the gentile world, and the other about the God of Israel. The characters within this episode are utilised in such a way that, at the end of *Daniel Dragonslayer*, a new reality about the God of Israel and what he can (or will not) do is created. As the editor or author's readers began to form a new understanding of their God, they also began to understand something of his identity.

Utilising space

How editors or authors utilise space to create realities, goes beyond the identification of different spaces in terms of places. Rather, it is an investigation into the creative properties of words that are associated with specific spaces.

Space is one of the basic domains of human thinking (Haspelmath 1997:1). Space is also the basic structure within which the body functions. As humans experience the world, they construct spatial paradigms through which they can catalogue phenomena such as *below*, *on top*, *inside*, *outside* and *under* (De Bruyn 2014).[11] For example, by means of the experience of walking into a building, different spaces can be identified. Words are then created to reflect or identify spaces as *inside* and *outside.* Homesteads are usually experienced and categorised as *private space* and not everyone is welcome to enter that space. On an abstract level, family is experienced as *close* and customarily may enter someone's private space. Within their different cultures humans may experience certain spaces as *sacred* or *holy.* Words such as temple, church or synagogue are then used to give meaning to the experience of those specific spaces. Sometimes body and space are combined in what can be described as *embodied spaces*. These embodied spaces are the way (and sometimes place) in which (where) human experience and consciousness takes spatial and material form in different *locations* and *entities* (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003:1). For example, throughout history people believed that deities and their spatial realms could be embodied in different forms or entities like a shrine, an altar, a city and even a person such as a priest or king. In *Daniel Dragonslayer*, the Babylonians and the king revered the δράκων as an embodied deity. These sacred embodied spaces can be described as *god spaces.*

Spatial markers are indications of embodied spaces within a text. Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga (2003:1–37) state six spatial markers: *the human body* (as a vessel of the self), *body space* (which centres around the human body), *gendered spaces*, *inscribed spaces*, *contested spaces* and *transnational space*. Zlatev (2007) adds another seven markers, viz.: *trajector*, *landmark*, *frame of reference*, *region*, *path*, *direction* and *motion*.

To read *Greek Daniel* as a larger narrative as well as reading it within a spatial-body framework, has interesting consequences for a reader's comprehension of the book. The larger *Daniel* narrative shows that what began as an invasion of the God of Israel's god space (Dn 1) is turned around into an invasion and destruction of the Babylonian deities' god space. This larger *Daniel* narrative goes on to end with the killing of the Babylonian gods in chapter 14 (De Bruyn 2014).

11.In experiencing spaces a distinction can be made between *primary experienced spaces* and *secondary experienced spaces*. Primary experienced spaces are typically those that can be identified through or by *movement*. For example, by walking up a mountain, a change in space can be experienced, which can be identified as *from below* to *above*. This experience of space is also on a *vertical* level. Movement in space can also be on a *horizontal* level where, for instance, a car is moving *towards* or *away* from a specific point. Secondary experienced spaces are those that are formed by cultural or religious frameworks. A temple or church, for example, is defined as holy, not by movement of the body, but through an experience based on paradigms in the mind. It is only through cultural or religious mind-sets that one building can be distinguished from another as holy.

Applying theory and method

Identifying the dragon

In *Daniel Dragonslayer* the word δράκων denotes an embodiment of either a deity or some supernatural entity. From the context of the narrative, it is clear that the δράκων was revered as a god (Th, v. 24), and its worship formed part of the Babylonian religion (OG/Th, v. 23). In the LXX, δράκων is often used for both the Hebrew words for 'seraph' (שָׂרָף) and 'snake' (נָחָשׁ; Ex 7:9–10, 12; Dt 32:33; Smith-Christopher 1996:152). δράκων is also used with reference to the Canaanite belief in the sea god, Yam, represented as a serpent (Job 9:13; 26:12; Ps 74:13–14; 104:26 148:7; Is 27). Despite evidence that the Babylonian god, Nina, was worshiped in the form of a snake (Charles 2004:653), the archaeological evidence for zoolatry (the worship of animals) in ancient Babylon is unconvincing (Smith-Christopher 1996:152). This led scholars to believe that the episode of *Daniel Dragonslayer* originated in Egypt where zoolatry was common (Charles 2004:653). In the LXX translation of Ezekiel, the Egyptian Pharaoh is called the 'great dragon' (Φαραω τὸν δράκοντα τὸν μέγαν; Ezk 29:3).

Fundamentally, δράκων refers to a large supernatural snake or serpent within the mystical world (Ogden 2013:2–4). Often it breathes fire and usually has wings and arms. In the mystical world, serpents mostly act on behalf of the gods or as guards of the gods (see Figure 2).

As stated earlier, the *Book of Daniel* is apocalyptic in nature. The editor or author combines aspects of wisdom, prophecy and mythology into a unique genre to comment on the identity of the God of Israel within the reality of the diaspora. This means that if *Daniel Dragonslayer* is read as part of the larger *Daniel* narrative, *Daniel's* apocalyptic nature must influence the analysis-outcome of the smaller episode. As a result, Daniel's killing of the δράκων can be read as part of a larger clash between good and evil. In this regard, Ogden (2013:12–14) suggests that the episode of *Daniel Dragonslayer* echoes older 'good-versus-evil' myths from Ancient Near Eastern cosmologies. For example, the *Zoroastrian text of Avesta* features battles with evil dragons. Zoroastrian dualism of good and evil may also have influenced the genre of Apocalyptism. Another example is the battle between Baal and Yam (Yam is usually represented as a sea serpent). In the Hebrew Bible, splashes of these myths are also found in Psalm 74:13–14 and Isaiah 27:1. In both these texts, the God of Israel does battle with a mythical serpent. Accordingly, it is possible that the editor or author of *Bel and the Dragon* borrowed from these older myths to construct his narrative within a reality where Israel's religion was threatened by other cosmologies. Thus, in *Daniel Dragonslayer*, the δράκων not only embodies a Babylonian deity, but all deities and worldviews that oppose the God of Israel as the real living God. Within an apocalyptic worldview it logically follows that the δράκων becomes the embodiment of evil and deceit, making the episode of *Daniel Dragonslayer* fits perfectly within Apocalyptism.

Source: Ogden, D., 2013, *Drakon. Dragon myth & serpent cult in the Greek & Roman worlds*, Oxford University Press, Oxford

FIGURE 2: A picture from a Babylonian cylinder – possibly the god Bel (Marduk) battling a dragon-like creature.

In relation to *Bel and the Dragon*

Daniel Dragonslayer follows directly after Daniel, as a priestly embodiment of the God of Israel (OG, v. 1), uncovers the deceit of the priests of Bel. Bel's idol and his temple are destroyed and his priests killed. With these events Daniel demonstrates to king Cyrus (Th, v. 1–2) that Bel is no true living god, for he does not eat and cannot protect his idol or his priests. *Eating* and *not eating* are used as elements to identify a deity. *To eat* is thus connected to *living*, whilst *not eating* is connected to *death*. In the story of *Bel and the Dragon,* life and death is thus embodied in *food*. The struggle between deities materialises with the underlying question: 'Who is the living God?' As the smaller narrative progresses through its three episodes, this question becomes a mechanism to progressively create the identity of the God of Israel. Life and death thus become concepts to construct a narrative as well as identity and reality.

Daniel Dragonslayer is thus the next step in creating a new identity for the God of Israel.

Episode 2

Challenging worldviews

Following the events of the first episode (*The disempowerment of Bel*, v. 1–22), the second episode takes the recreation of deities to the next level – a deity is killed by feeding it.

The king shows Daniel a δράκων, emphasising the fact that this creature does in fact eat and drink and therefore was alive (OG, v. 24). According to the worldview of the king and the Babylonians, divinity was determined by both qualitative and quantitative elements. In order to qualify as a deity, a god should be nourished by humans and he or she should eat a lot (Th, v. 6). Within this worldview, Daniel showed the king that Bel was not a god for he did not eat, but the δράκων was indeed another matter. Daniel could not deny that it eats and drinks. People did not have to depend on priests for affirmation that the δράκων ate – they could evaluate it with their own eyes. Thus, the king commanded Daniel to worship the creature (Th, verse 24), stating that this is a living

god (Th, verse 24). In this way tension is created in the story: What is Daniel going to do?

Surprisingly, Daniel does not submit to the divinity of the δράκων, but instead declares that he will only worship the Lord his God, the God of Israel, because he is a living God (τὸν ζῶντα θεὸν; Th, verse 25). In this the editor or author utilises Daniel as a defence mechanism for the presence of the God of Israel. This is emphasised in OG, verse 1, where Daniel is introduced as a priest (ἱερεύς) of God. Daniel can thus be described as a priestly vessel of God and an extension of the God of Israel's god space. It can be argued that Daniel, as a priest, mediates the presence of God. Two spaces or worldviews can thus be identified within this smaller episode, viz. that of Daniel and that of the gentile Babylonians. These worldviews can be summarised as follows:

- The Babylonian worldview (dominant worldview):
  - The δράκων is an embodied deity.
  - Daniel should submit to the Babylonian gods, for they defeated the God of Israel when Nebuchadnezzar invaded his god space (Dn 1).
  - Within the vicinity of the δράκων, the God of Israel should not have power, for he is a degraded god.
- Daniel's worldview (challenging worldview):
  - The δράκων is not a living god.
  - Only the God of Israel is a real living deity.
  - The God of Israel is not a degraded deity.

Daniel, the proto dragonslayer

The editor or author also utilises Daniel to challenge the worldview of the gentile world. Accordingly, Daniel also becomes a mechanism of attack. Instead of revering the δράκων, Daniel does the unthinkable: he asks the king permission to kill the δράκων and, by doing so, prove to the world that it is not a living deity (καὶ εἶπεν δανιηλ κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ μου προσκυνήσω ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν θεὸς ζῶν σὺ δέ βασιλεῦ δός μοι ἐξουσίαν καὶ ἀποκτενῶ τὸν δράκοντα ἄνευ μαχαίρας καὶ ῥάβδου; Th, v. 25). The events of the first episode should still have been fresh in the king's memory. Whatever the reason may have been, the king granted Daniel permission to prove his statements. Elsewhere, it was proposed that the king embodies those people who had their doubts about the God of Israel.

Similar to the first episode, Daniel used the Babylonians' own worldview to prove that the δράκων is not a real living god. If a deity should be nourished by humans, Daniel will do so, and if the δράκων is a god, it will live and prosper. Daniel feeds the creature with cakes (μάζας) made from a mixture of pitch [πίσσαν], fat [στῆρ] and hair [τρίχας]. As with the events in the first episode, βρῶμα [food] is used as a tool of destruction. In episode 1, food is part of the motive to reveal the truth that Bel does *not* eat and therefore is no god. In this second episode, it is used as a tool to *kill*. Again, food is used to reveal the truth: the δράκων is no real living deity. Here, food serves as an embodiment of death.

We do not know why Daniel fed the creature this specific mixture. Perhaps, Daniel, as a priestly vessel of God, had some divine insight about the explosive quality of the mixture (Collins 1993:415). According to later Jewish traditions, Daniel added nails and straw, and even iron combs in the mixture. However, reading too much into the mixture may focus attention away from the message of the story. The episode only narrates that after the δράκων ate Daniel's cakes, it burst open (διαρρήγνυμι) and died. Instead of prospering after it was nourished, the creature died. With one single act of feeding, Daniel becomes a proto dragonslayer for later Christian saints.

A new worldview

In killing the δράκων, Daniel turned the gentile worldview upside down. One would expect that a deity should know if something is harmful or not. From childhood, humans learn through bodily experience that some foods are not good for human health. Although humans make mistakes and can accidently eat something harmful, one would think that a deity should know better, because one would further assume that deities are superior in knowledge. Furthermore, one would expect that a deity could sustain or cure itself when ill, but not this δράκων. It simply burst open and died. In dying after eating, the creature itself proved that it is no living god. The δράκων cannot sustain life.

When the second episode ends, the identities of the gods of the gentile world as well as those of the God of Israel are successful recreated. Before the challenge to the divinity of the δράκων, there still was a chance that at least one other Babylonian deity may be stronger than the God of Israel – alas, there is none. Now that it is proven that the Babylonian gods are false lifeless gods, people can begin to reconsider the identity of the God of Israel as a degraded deity. If the Babylonian gods are false and no real gods, then the God of Israel was never defeated by them in the first place when his god space was violated. With the killing of the δράκων, the clash between the God of Israel and the Babylonian gods has come full circle. What started as an invasion of the God of Israel's god space in *Daniel* 1 is turned around and leads to the killing of the Babylonian gods in *Daniel* 14. At the end of episode 2, the δράκων is identified as a powerless, lifeless god.

The recreation of the δράκων identity can be summarised by the following scheme (see Figure 3):

As in episode 1, the same worldviews that once proclaimed the δράκων as a living god, must now admit that it is *not* a living god. In his or her own way, the editor or author shows that the worldviews of the gentile world are no longer valid. In reality, there is indeed more to the God of Israel than what popular worldviews would permit people to believe.

In relation to the *Book of Daniel*

Daniel Dragonslayer not only has a reciprocal relationship to *Bel and the Dragon*, but also to the larger *Book of Daniel*. The

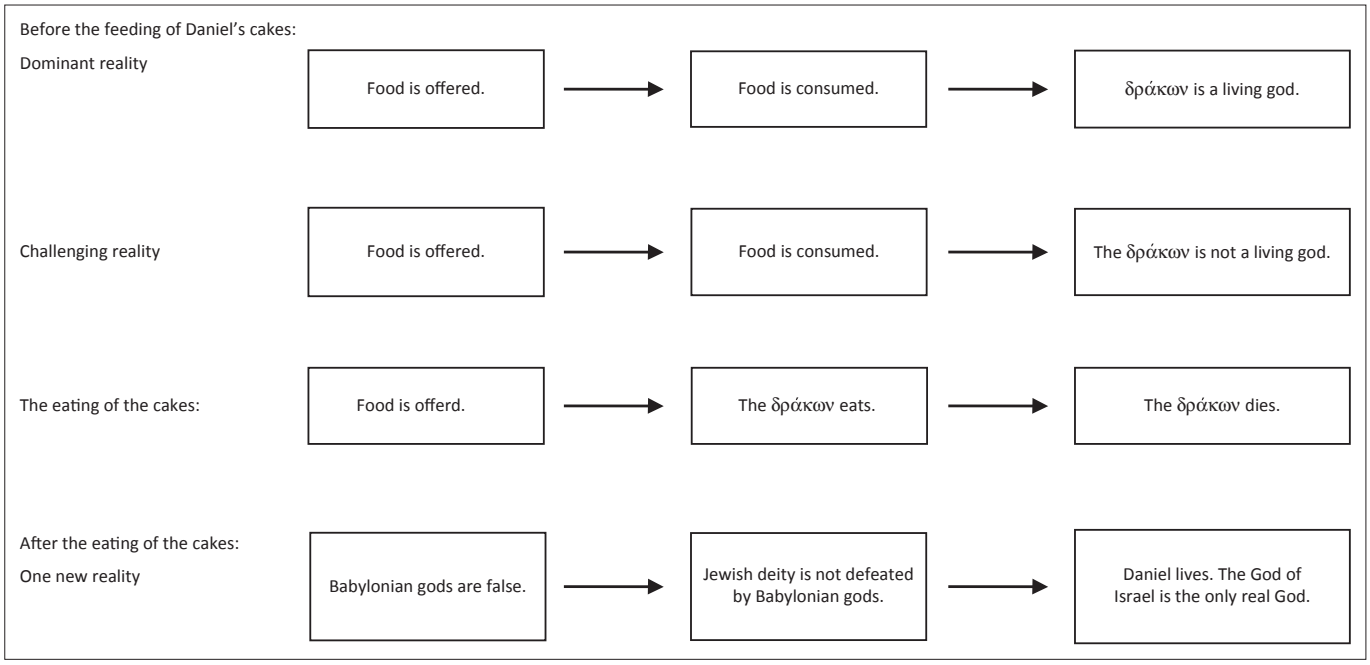


FIGURE 3: The recreation of the δράκων identity.

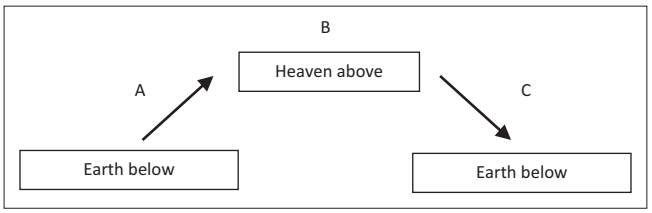


FIGURE 4: The movement of *space* in the narratives of Daniel.

episode of *Daniel Dragonslayer* fits into the apocalyptic genre of the *Book of Daniel*. In this regard, the δράκων of episode 2 can be described as an embodiment of evil within the cosmic struggle between the forces of evil and the God of Israel.

Two major spaces can be identified in the larger narrative of the *Greek Daniel*. These spaces are on a vertical level, viz. *below* and *above* (see Figure 4).

The events of *Daniel* 1–6 take place on earth below (A in Figure 4). In these chapters, the editor or author creates the reality that the God of Israel is not bound to specific earthly god spaces as the popular cosmologies of the ancient world proclaimed. Despite people's worldviews, the God of Israel's power stretches all over the world. The events of *Daniel* 7–12 move to the heavens above (B in Figure 4). From a heavenly perspective of the world, the editor or author creates the reality that the God of Israel is universal. According to this new reality, everything that happens on earth below or in heaven above is part of God's strategy in his clash with evil. The suffering of the faithful is thus part of a larger deity war. In *Daniel* 7–12 the Jewish deity is identified as omnipresent and almighty.

The events of *Daniel Dragonslayer* again take place down on earth (C in Figure 4). The Greek editor or author shows his readers that the newly discovered identity of God has renewed consequences on earth. In *Daniel* 14, after Daniel is shown the heavenly strategy of God (Dn 7–12), the editor or author comes to the conclusion that if God is going to be victorious in the end (ἔσχατος), then there is no place for false gods on earth. There is only one living God, and that is the God of Israel who requires his faithful to shun all alien cosmologies and worldviews. This is symbolised by Daniel, who slays the δράκων. In *Daniel* 1–6, the character Daniel is utilised as a spatial vessel of the God of Israel to establish a powerbase for God outside of Israel (De Bruyn 2014). In a sense, Daniel is used as a defence mechanism for the presence of God (Jordaan 2008). The way in which the editor or author utilises Daniel progresses from chapter 1 to 14 until Daniel becomes a weapon of destruction whereby the God of Israel destroys the pseudodeities.

Consequences for the reader

The consequences of the editor or author's recreation of the ancient worldviews are the same for both the first and second episodes of *Bel and the Dragon*. The universal struggle of the Jewish deity with the forces of evil is uniquely reflected in Daniel's killing of the δράκων. However, Daniel's slaying of the δράκων also symbolises the Jewish believers' struggle with foreign religions. The editor or author utilises Daniel as a mechanism to give 'inside' knowledge to the reader. As the larger narrative unfolds, the reader is taken along with Daniel in his discovery of not only God's new identity as universal, but also God's heavenly strategy. At the end of *Daniel* 14 the reader knows what Daniel knows and, in this way, the editor or author recreates a new cosmology in the minds of his readers.

Within this new cosmology, Jews should not be afraid of foreign worldviews – other so-called deities or kings such

as Antiochus IV Epiphanes who imagined themselves a god. The God of Israel is in total control. All other gods are not only powerless, but also false. The Jews living in the diaspora should remain faithful to God. Religious syncretism and foreign religious practices should not be tolerated. Because God is victorious over evil, it is the faithful's duty to fight evil in their daily lives – even if it means showing intolerance to other religions whether Babylonian, Persian or Greek, all other religions and their gods must be opposed.

Conclusion

Combining the aspects of narrative critique, editorial critique, genre, body and space into a body-space framework indicates the following:

- The episode called *Daniel Dragonslayer* is part of a larger clash of deities.
- The editor or author utilises this episode, together with the other chapters of *Greek Daniel*, to recreate the identity of not only the God of Israel, but also that of foreign deities.
- The editor or author creates a new worldview about the God of Israel, making it possible for Jews to remain faithful to their God, even in the face of persecution.
- There is a shift in tolerance towards other worldviews in the *Book of Daniel*. In the first chapters, the different cosmologies of Daniel and that of the gentiles co-exist together. As the larger narrative unfolds to the end of *Daniel* 14, there is no more place for other worldviews within the editor or author's newly created reality.
- The dragon-slaying motive in this episode-story may have influenced the New Testament (cf. Rv 12–13) and early dragon-slaying Christian traditions.

In a unique way, the editor or author contributes to the development of how Jews regarded the God of Israel within the reality of the diaspora.

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