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Changing Perceptions of Daniel: Reading Dan 4 and 5 in Context

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Introduction

The book of Daniel is a composite work finished in the second century BCE, with a history of development.¹ Unfortunately, when we work on the book, concentrating on its composite nature, we can allow the history of development to overshadow the fact that the stories and visions—however and whenever they came together—are now one work that together propprt to tell a story. Scholars have tended not to ask broad narrative questions about Daniel,

¹ At least chapters 2–6, and possibly an earlier form of chapter 7 predate the second century. Rainer Albertz, “The Social Setting of the Aramaic and Hebrew Book of Daniel,” in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception* (eds. John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint; with the assistance of VanEpps Cameron; Supplements to Vetus Testamentum (83); Formation and Interpretation of Old Testament Literature 2; Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2001), 1.171–204, maintains that chapter 7 began under Antiochus III. Among critical scholars Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (trans. P. R. Ackroyd; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 517–29; and H. H. Rowley, “The Unity of the Book of Daniel,” in *The Servant of the Lord and other Essays on the Old Testament* (H. H. Rowley; 2nd ed.; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965; repr., 1968), 249–80, adopted the view of a unified composition from the second century BCE, but that position has not been followed. Jan-Wim Wesselius has recently reasserted this claim (Jan-Wim Wesselius, “Discontinuity, Congruence and the Making of the Hebrew Bible,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 13 [1999]: 24–77; Jan-Wim Wesselius, “The Writing of Daniel,” in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception* [eds. J. J. Collins and P. W. Flint; with the assistance of V. Cameron; 2 vols.; VTSup {83}; FIOTL 2; Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2001], 2:291–310). Unfortunately, he does not adequately deal with the implications of the Greek versions (Wesselius, “Writing of Daniel,” 309), or with the implications of the different nature of the Aramaic among the chapters, on which see F. H. Polak, “The Daniel Tales in Their Aramaic Literary Milieu,” in *The Book of Daniel in the Light of New Findings* (ed. A. S. van der Woude; BETL Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993), 249–65.

but have instead focussed on individual chapters.² By our not considering the stories in their present literary context of chapters 1–12, I am convinced that we miss some of their present significance and how context has changed original portrayals.³ In this paper I want to highlight how I think the editors of the present Hebrew-Aramaic version of Daniel change the perception of how Daniel is able to interpret a dream and the writing on the wall in chapters 4–5. To do this they used the placement of stories, narrative clarifications, and repetition of words to shape how the readers/hearers understand what happens in these chapters.

Background

First, however, let's summarize some of the background information relevant to chapters 4 and 5.

Court Tales

Since Lee Humphreys, John J. Collins, and others wrote in the 70s, scholars have referred to the accounts in Daniel 1–6 as court tales.⁴ This perspective has helped to put the stories into the broader context of similar literature, thus clarifying that some stories are about how courtiers survive in the midst of jealousies (conflict stories; chapters 3 and 6) and others are about how

² Dana Fewell (*Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics in the Book of Daniel* [2nd ed.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1991]) is an obvious exception to this trend, although her focus is on the roles of God and king as they relate to power.

³ Matthias Henze, "The Narrative Frame of Daniel: a Literary Assessment," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period* 32 (2001): 5–24 is a helpful study that considers the function of the stories in their present form in the book of Daniel.

⁴ W. Lee Humphreys, "A Life-Style for Diaspora: a Study of the Tales of Esther and Daniel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92 (1973): 211–23; John J. Collins, "The Court-Tales in Daniel and the Development of Apocalyptic," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94 (1975): 218–34; Susan Niditch and Robert Doran, "The Success Story of the Wise Courtier: a Formal Approach," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (1977): 179–93. Hans Peter Müller, "Märchen, Legende Und Enderwartung: Zum Verständnis Des Buches Daniel," *Vetus Testamentum* 26 (1976): 77–98; Lawrence M. Wills, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King: Ancient Jewish Court Legends* (HDR 26; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 10-11; and Lawrence M. Wills, *The Jewish Novel in the Ancient World* (Myth and Poetics; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995). A thoughtful corrective to the use of the stories for determining social location of the authors can be found in Henze, "Narrative frame of Daniel," 5–24.

they sometimes excelled in contests with their peers (contest stories; chapters 2, 4, 5). This way of looking at them has brought us insights into the individual stories. Nonetheless, rather than help us to see the stories as part of a larger narrative, this approach has tended to atomization of the collection by focusing only on individual chapters separate from the whole.

Editing

I do want to acknowledge the evidence of editing in the stories. For example, there are two early Greek versions of Daniel. The Old Greek version exists today only in two manuscripts⁵ and in the Syriac version. The later Theodotion version is closer to the Masoretic Text where they have parallel contents, and is the version that eventually dominated in Christian circles. The relationship among the Greek and the Hebrew-Aramaic versions is complex, and not quite clear. However, the Old Greek seems to preserve the oldest material.⁶

Looking just at chapters 4 and 5 there are a number of significant differences. In chapter 4:

- Rather than the story being embedded in a letter to the peoples of the empire, it is merely an event related by the king. At the end of the account it does seem that it could be part of a letter sent to “all nations and all countries, and all the inhabitants in them” and to their sophists, and mention is made of the king sending letters telling everyone about what happened (OG v. 34c). However, the

⁵ The second century CE papyrus 967, and MS 88/the Chigi MS.

⁶ P. S. David, “The Composition and Structure of the Book of Daniel: a Synchronic and Diachronic Reading.” (PhD diss., Katholieke Universiteit, 1991), 41–96, provides an excellent overview of the literature to 1991. See specifically 87–96; and Johan Lust, “The Septuagint Version of Daniel 4-5,” in *The Book of Daniel in the Light of New Findings* (ed. A. S. van der Woude; BETL Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993), 39–53; Olivier Munnich, “Texte Massorétique et Septante dans le Livre de Daniel,” in *The earliest text of the Hebrew Bible: the relationship between the Masoretic text and the Hebrew base of the Septuagint reconsidered* (A. Schenker; SCS 52; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003); and R. Timothy McLay, “The Old Greek Translation of Daniel Chapters 4-6 and the Formation of the Book of Daniel,” *Vetus Testamentum* [forthcoming]).

formal features of an Aramaic letter are no longer there.⁷

- The story in OG is *not* told as a tale of court contest. In the MT (vv. 3–6 [ET6–9]) and Theodotion versions the king summons the diviners, who are unable to interpret; but in OG at 4:15 [ET 18], the king only mentions Daniel when he summons him, as the head of his sophists and dream interpreters, to interpret the dream; a failure by other diviners is not part of the OG story.
- Related to the previous point is the fact that in OG, Daniel is not mentioned at all until the reference in 4:15 [ET 18], whereas in MT and Th he is mentioned first at 4:8 [ET 5].

In chapter 5 there are also significant sections of the Aramaic story that have no parallel in the OG version.

- The reminder of who Daniel is in vv. 10–12 is paralleled by much less in the Old Greek.⁸
- The explanation of Daniel’s skills in OG vv. 11-16 (MT vv. 14 and 15 are not represented) is much less than in the MT vv. 11-16 where various skill sets are highlighted, twice.
- The extensive reference by Daniel, in vv. 18-22, back to the events of chapter 4 is lacking in the Old Greek.

⁷ Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, “Aramaic Epistolography,” *Semeia* 22 (1982): 25–57.

⁸ “That man was understanding and wise and surpassed all the sages of Babylon and there is a holy spirit in him and in the days of your father the king he expounded exceedingly difficult interpretations” (Collins’s translation).

Such differences throughout the OG material⁹ indicates that it preserves an older, less edited collection of the stories.¹⁰

This is preface to my point that what we have in the MT is later and better edited—a version in which the stories were shaped into their final Hebrew-Aramaic form for the second century BCE audience, and so in that edition we might expect to find features that reflect the interests of the second century authors-editors.¹¹

Structure

That there is planning to the present form of the MT book also seems to be clear. The chiasmic symmetry of chapters 2–7 was noted by Lenglet in 1972, and it is clear to many if not most scholars that he is right in this:¹² chapters 2 & 7 are paired by the four empire scheme; chapters 3 & 6 are paired by divine deliverance of those obedient to God; and chapters 4 & 5 are paired by the divine humbling of a Babylonian king, and are a unit, with extensive references

⁹ Such as the way that Daniel is introduced in the story of Bel and the Snake, as if he were unknown to the readers. The doxologies in 3:33 and 4:31–32 have similar materials in 2:20–23 and 6:27–28. John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 220.

¹⁰ Rainer Albertz, *Der Gott des Daniel: Untersuchungen zu Daniel 4–6 in der Septuagintafassung sowie zu Komposition und Theologie des aramäischen Danielbuches* (Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 131; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1988), and Wills, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King* also discuss the relationship between the versions and other materials in great detail. McLay (“Old Greek Translation of Daniel Chapters 4-6) argues convincingly for a complex translation and redaction history for the Daniel materials.

¹¹ Against Collins and others, Henze, “The Narrative Frame of Daniel,” 5–24, argues that the story can tell us nothing about the social setting of the authors, and only about the agenda of the authors/editors. That there is editing of the material for the second century setting seems to confirm this.

¹² Examples of agreement: Collins, *Daniel*, 33–4; Albertz, “Social setting of the Aramaic and Hebrew Book of Daniel,” 171–204; Jan-Wim Wesseliuss, “Language and Style in Biblical Aramaic: Observations on the Unity of Daniel 2-6,” *Vetus Testamentum* 38 (1988): 194–209; Paul L. Redditt, *Daniel* (New Century Bible Commentary; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 27; Munnich, “Texte Massorétique et Septante dans le Livre de Daniel.” Disagreement: Philip R. Davies, *Daniel* (Old Testament Guides; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 44; David W. Gooding, “The Literary Structure of the Book of Daniel and Its Implications,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 32 (1981): 43–79, esp., p. 51n.13

being made from chapter 5 back to chapter 4.¹³ Even the sandwiching of the Aramaic materials between the Hebrew chapters 1 and 8–12 can be seen as a continuation of this chiastic symmetry.¹⁴

My Interests

One of the agenda items that I argue the authors-editors brought to the stories was to clarify the role of Daniel *viz a vis* his ability to provide interpretations. Initially I was following the work of Hans-Peter Müller and John J. Collins, who argued that the portrayal of Daniel in these stories is that of a court diviner—a mantic as they termed it.¹⁵ It is clear that Daniel *is* compared with diviners in chapters 1, 2, 4, and 5. In their original settings the stories portrayed Daniel positively as a diviner, albeit one who out-does his opponents because of the aid of his God. The argument is that these stories developed either among courtiers who were in such positions, or among Jews who aspired to be among such positions in the courts of Mesopotamia. It has also been observed that Daniel’s portrayal in the stories is at odds with his role in the vision materials of 7–12, where he becomes quite incapable of interpreting and sometimes even of understanding what is interpreted for him. For example, at 8:27 we read:

And I, Daniel, was overcome and lay sick for some days; then I rose and went about the king's business; but I was appalled by the vision and did not understand it.

This Daniel is nothing like the skilled interpreter of chapters 1-6! HOWEVER, I now think that when read as a whole, the portrayal of Daniel becomes consistent. So, let’s look at how that

¹³ A. Lenglet, “La Structure Littéraire de Daniel 2-7,” *Biblica* 53 (1972): 169–90. I take the designation “chiastic symmetry” from Jerome T. Walsh, *Style and Structure in Biblical Hebrew Narrative* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001), 13–34.

¹⁴ And the recent work of Jan-Wim Wesseliuss suggesting that the book of Daniel imitates the arrangement of Ezra is promising as another source in understanding the arrangement of the book. Wesseliuss, “Writing of Daniel,” 291–310.

¹⁵ Collins, “Court-tales,” 218–34, Hans-Peter Müller, “Magisch-Mantische Weisheit und die Gestalt Daniels,” *Ugarit-Forschungen* 1 (1969): 79–94, Hans-Peter Müller, “Mantische Weisheit und Apokalyptik,” *Vetus Testamentum: Supplements* 22 (1972): 268–93, Müller, “Märchen, Legende und Enderwartung,” 338–50.

image changes from a reading independent of context to one within the book of Daniel.

The stories out of their present context

MT chapter 4 is crafted as a letter from Nebuchadnezzar to his kingdom, in which he extols the God of Daniel who had “put him in his place” as a mere mortal. As the king tells the story, he had a dream that troubled him; he summoned his court diviners to tell him what it meant; but they were stumped. At last he called in Daniel whom he says, in vv. 5–6 [ET 8–9] and 15 [ET 18], is able to interpret the dream because he has “a spirit of the holy gods in him”.¹⁶

At this point in the story Daniel becomes the focus: he pauses for a period of time, v. 16 [ET 19]: “Then Daniel ... was severely distressed for a while. His thoughts terrified him.” (NRSV); then he gives his interpretation of the dream and is not heard of again until the next chapter. The king continues to relate how his hubris brings the judgment of God upon him, and then how he recovers from it, and regains his position, to the praise of the King of Heaven.

My question of this chapter is, how are we to understand that Daniel has accomplished his interpretation? How does he know what the dream means? All that we are told in the story is something from the the king’s point-of-view. That is only the observation of a pagan ruler; is the reader to accept what Nebuchadnezzar assumes to be the case? The role assigned to Daniel’s God is only as the chastiser of the king for his hubris. It has to be assumed that the same God that humbled the king, gave him the dream, but that is nowhere stated. It also has to be assumed that the same God gave Daniel the ability to interpret the dream, but again the story says nothing about that. There is no reference here to any form of direct or indirect revelation from God, such

¹⁶ On this phrase, see Bob Becking, ““A Divine Spirit Is in You: Notes on the Translation of the Phrase Rû^{ah} ʿlahîn in Daniel 5,14 and Related Texts,” in *The Book of Daniel in the Light of New Findings* (ed. A. S. van der Woude; BETL Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993), 515–32; and R. Glenn Wooden, “The Book of Daniel and Manticism: A Critical Assessment of the View That the Book of Daniel Derives From a Mantic Tradition.” (PhD diss., University of St. Andrews, 2000), 215–41.

as we find in chapter 2 or in chapters 7–12.

Chapter 5 is the account of Belshazzar and the writing on the wall. The king holds a feast at which he uses the vessels from the temple in Jerusalem to toast gods. A disembodied hand writes מְנַא מְנַא תְּכַל פְּסִין on a wall, which terrifies the king. His diviners cannot unlock the significance of the words, and so he is encouraged to call upon the famous and skilled Daniel, who had assisted Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel is said by the queen (-mother) and Belshazzar in vv. 11–12 to be one in whom were found “an excellent spirit, knowledge, and understanding to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems”, and he is again referred to in v. 14 as one in whom there is “a spirit of the (holy) gods”, and the possessor of “wisdom like the wisdom of the gods”.

11 ... There is a man in your kingdom who is endowed with a spirit of the holy gods. In the days of your father he was found to have enlightenment, understanding, and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods. Your father, King Nebuchadnezzar, made him chief of the magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans, and diviners, 12 because an excellent spirit, knowledge, and understanding to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belshazzar....

14 I have heard of you that a spirit of the gods is in you, and that enlightenment, understanding, and excellent wisdom are found in you. ...

16 But I have heard that you can give interpretations and solve problems. (NRSV)

As well, in v. 24 Daniel asserts that the hand and its message come from the “Most High God” (v. 21).

As in the previous chapter, when looked at independently, there is little to answer the question, How did Daniel know what the words on the wall meant? The queen, and then the king, refer back to some previous incident, but the reference is to what Nebuchadnezzar learned, not to what Daniel told them, for example. Again, we have the perspectives of Babylonians. Is the reader being asked to believe non-Jews? As well, here there is no pause; Daniel says only, “Nevertheless I will read the writing to the king and let him know the interpretation” (NRSV),

and then launches into his sermonette and interpretation.

Both stories have Babylonians describe Daniel as having a spirit of holy gods in him, and he is portrayed as having an ability that he can use when needed and at will. He hears the dream and interprets it; he sees the words on the wall and without hesitation tells what they mean.

When we examine the stories as independent units Daniel seems to function much like the divinely gifted craftsman Bezalel of whom we are told in Exodus 31:2ff:

3 I have filled him with the spirit of God, with ability (חכמה), intelligence (תבונה), and knowledge (דעה) in every kind of craft, 4 to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, 5 in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, in every kind of craft. 6 Moreover, I have appointed with him Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have given skill to all the skillful, so that they may make all that I have commanded you.

Bezalel is divinely gifted and so does not wait for revelations before beginning his work. He is simply skilled to conceive designs and to do his work, and he is commissioned to get on with it.

We find similar portrayals of divinely gifted people in the Joseph character and in the unnamed Jewish גזר in the Prayer of Nabonidus, which is somehow related to Daniel 4.

Clearly, the nature of the role played by Daniel in the free standing chapters 4 and 5 is in stark contrast to the one played by him in chapters 7–12. In chapter 9, for example, he reads Jeremiah's prophecy of a 70 year exile, and cannot understand it, and needs the help of an angel who reveals the meaning to him. This observation is what other scholars have noted, but it assumes the reading of the stories as independent from the larger context of the book.

The stories in their present context

However, now I would like to look at the chapters in context and highlight how I believe the redactors wanted to change that perception—or at least how their work effected a change.

Whether it was their intention to change how Daniel is to be perceived, an assumption about his

role that crept in unawares, or merely the result of what was done with the stories, there is a change.

Read in the later context of the overall story the perspective on Daniel changes, because within the larger narrative *Daniel never acts without divine revelation*—the portrayal over the whole book becomes consistent. He relies not merely upon an innate ability or even a god-given gift, but upon direct revelations and interpretations. Although in chapters 4 and 5 it is a Babylonian king who attributes Daniel’s abilities to a divine spirit, in the Maccabean version of the stories, at 1:17, it is clearly stated from the Jewish narrator’s perspective that, “[A] to the four God gave knowledge and skill in every aspect of literature and wisdom; and [B] to Daniel, insight into all visions and dreams.”¹⁷ Narratively, all later statements about Daniel’s abilities and actions are influenced by this now initial, Jewish one. On the basis of *A* alone, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are said in 1:21 to be found ten times better than the kings’ practicing diviners. The second half of that comment [*B*] prepares the reader for the rest of the book where Daniel interprets and receives revelations. Thus, the kings in chapters 4 and 5 are not wrong about the divine origins of Daniel’s abilities, it is only their belief in multiple gods that would be wrong.

Chapter 2 expands on 1:17b. Nebuchadnezzar demands that his diviners give him both the content of a dream he had and its interpretation. They cannot, but Daniel can, and he leads his three friends in a night-time prayer meeting, asking that God reveal both the king’s dream and the interpretation; this happens. In thanks Daniel bursts forth into a prayer at 2:20–23:¹⁸

¹⁷ Reading with the OG, which seems to have understood יִבְרַח as an infinitive, καὶ τοῖς νεανίσκοις ἔδωκεν ὁ κύριος ... καὶ τῷ Δανιηλ ἔδωκε σύνεσιν

¹⁸ On the prayer, in addition to the commentaries see G. T. M. Prinsloo, “Two Poems in a Sea of Prose: the Content and Context of Daniel 2:20-23 and 6:27-28,” *Journal for the Study of the Old*

<p>להוא שמה די־אלהא מברך מן־עלמא ועד־עלמא די חכמתא וגבורתא די לה־היא והוא מהשנא עדניא וזמניא מהעדה מלכין ומהקים מלכין יהב חכמתא לחכימין ומנדעא לידעי בינה הוא גלא עמיקתא ומסתרתא ידע מה בחשוכא וגהורא עמה שרא לך אלה אבהתי מהודא ומשבח אנה די חכמתא וגבורתא יהבת לי וכען הודעתני די־בעינא מןך די־מלת מלכא הודעתנא</p>	<p>20 Blessed be the name of God from age to age, for <u>wisdom and power</u> are his.</p> <p>21 He changes times and seasons, deposes kings and sets up kings; he gives <u>wisdom to the wise</u> and <u>knowledge to those who have understanding</u>.</p> <p>22 He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with him.</p> <p>23 To you, O God of my ancestors, I give thanks and praise, for you have <u>given me wisdom and power</u>, and have now <u>revealed to me</u> what we asked of you, for you have revealed to us what the king ordered.</p>
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I do not have time to touch on all the places where themes and words from this poem are picked up in the other chapters of the book, but that happens, and thus this poem coming as it does so early in the book, becomes the hermeneutical lens through which we are to read what Daniel does in chapters 4 and 5.¹⁹ Thus, it is made clear through the poem that if one is truly, and that means, heavenly wise—and the court diviners have proven that they are not—then that wisdom comes from God. The God of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah is the source of the heavenly mysteries, and that God has made them known to Daniel. When in chapter 5 the queen (mother) relates Daniel’s reputation to Belshazzar, she says that, “he was found to have enlightenment, understanding, and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods”

Testament Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 59 (1993): 93-108; W. Sibley Towner, “Poetic Passages of Daniel 1-6,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 31 (1969): 317–26; Philip R. Davies, “Daniel Chapter Two,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 27 (1976): 393–5; Davies, *Daniel*, 45–8

¹⁹ See also R. Glenn Wooden, “The Witness of Daniel in the Court of the Kings,” in *You Will Be My Witnesses: A Festschrift in Honor of the Reverend Dr. Allison A. Trites on the Occasion of His Retirement* (R. G. Wooden, T. R. Ashley, and R. S. Wilson; Macon: Mercer University Press, 2003), 47–51. Prinsloo (“Two Poems in a Sea of Prose”, 95-101) argues that the poem is the central focus of the chapter.

נְהִירוּ וּשְׁכַלְתֵּנוּ וְחִכְמָה כַּחֲכַמְת־אֱלֹהִין. These words hark back to 1:4 and 17 (מְשַׁכְּלִים) where Daniel is described with the verb שְׁכַל and to the poem, in 2:21 (חֲכֻמָּה), and 22 (נְהוֹרָא Q), where light is a wisdom term and it dwells with God, and where wisdom is said to come from God, and so Daniel's wisdom is like God's. In the context of the poem in chapter 2, the mystery, that is, the dream and its interpretation, is revealed; that wisdom is not derived from Daniel's innate ability or his God-given ability, it is directly revealed to him: (v. 30): "... as for me, this mystery has been revealed to me not because of any wisdom that I have more than any other living being...."

Thus, when we come to chapters 4 and 5, we have been prepared to correctly understand the source of Daniel's abilities. They are not merely impressive human feats, even divinely granted gifts like holy men such as those celebrated in the stories of Elijah and Elisha; they have a direct divine origin. Although the observations of Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 4 (and repeated by his 'son' in chapter 5) are from the mouth of a Babylonian, when seen through Maccabean, Jewish eyes, he got it right, he just erred on the multiplicity of gods. The narrative, thus prepares the reader/hearer to see beyond the words of the king. Chapter 1 begins to give us context for the understanding of Daniel in his role as a court diviner, and thus, as a later, possibly Maccabean addition to the book begins to change our perception of what Daniel does in subsequent chapters. The sequence in which the information is given is important. By prefacing chapters 4 and 5 with the information from 1:17 and the prayer in 2:20-23, the editors of the stories make it clear that when we come to chapters 4 and 5, we are not to understand Daniel as acting without divine revelation. He was not merely a diviner; he was much more prophetic, from the Jewish point of view.

Other clues point in the same direction, that the early chapters of the book of Daniel might be meant to alter our view of what the main character does. Chapter 4 has Daniel waiting a while before telling Nebuchadnezzar what the dream means. We are also told that he was distressed about what he was thinking and his thoughts terrified him (בְּהַל MT v. 16 [ET v. 19]). Without a broader context to clarify matters, it could be that he was reluctant to tell the king out of fear or respect. Now, coming after chapter 2 readers/hearers might ask whether or not he was supposed to be receiving a revelation. There are in fact a few suggestions within the book of Daniel that this is a possible intention of the editors. At 4:2 [ET 5], and 7:28, and 5:6, 9, 10, the same verb as in 4:16 [ET 19], בְּהַל, is used in the context of the king's and Daniel's reception of the dream and vision, the same verb is used of Saul's terror in 1 Samuel 28:21 when he encountered the divined spirit of Samuel.²⁰ This verb when used of fear, at least in Daniel, is associated with the reception of revelations, whether indirect dreams or direct visions. But he is standing before the king, not in his own residence as in chapter 2. However, in Daniel 10, Daniel begins to see a vision while people are standing with him beside a river, but only he sees the vision, those with him experience only extreme fear and flee (vv. 5–7). The pause in chapter 4, therefore, could be understood as a scenario similar to that of Samuel who was standing before the sons of Jesse in 1 Samuel 16 having a private conversation with God about which son he was to anoint as king; or like Ezekiel in Ezekiel 8:1ff to 11:24–25, who was at home with the elders, all the while seeing divine beings with whom he had conversations and going places.

This was, indeed, how Daniel's reaction was understood in *Lives of the Prophets*, which

²⁰ Collins, *Daniel*, 228. It should be noted that this verb describes fear in the face of battle, the numinous, sudden death, and Yahweh and not the fear of someone (TDOT 2.3–5). It would seem to be “an emotional reaction by someone confronted by an unexpected threat or disaster” NIDOTTE 1.610. it occurs through Daniel at, terrified 4:5 [ET 2] (king Nebuchadnezzar), 19^{2x} [ET 16^{2x}] (king addressing Daniel); 5:6, 9, 10 (king Belshazzsar); 7:15, 28 (Daniel); 11:44 (Antiochus). The same root is used for quickness in Daniel (2:25; 3:24; 6:20 [ET 19]) and elsewhere.

relates only the events of chapter 4 for the life of Daniel. Although the details are different, in this version of the story, Daniel's knowledge of what happens to Nebuchadnezzar comes through divine revelation: 4:6 "Concerning this mystery [Nebuchadnezzar's illness] it was revealed to the holy man that... Ἀπεκαλύφθη τῷ ὁσίῳ περὶ τοῦ μυστηρίου τούτου; and 4:8 "Through God the saint knew... Ἔγνω διὰ θεοῦ ὁ ἅγιος.²¹

Chapter 5 presents a challenge to the proposal that Daniel is portrayed as receiving a vision, because Daniel seems to take even less time to give his interpretation; there is no wait, and so no recognition of time to receive a revelation.²² But, lest we mistakenly think that Daniel is acting merely as a diviner, the editors of the final form of the book provide dates for chapters 7 and 8 that clarify the situation. These chapters could have been dated by the editors to any time in the life of Daniel after the time of chapter 6, as in fact happens with the dating of chapters 9 to the first year of Darius, and 10-12 to the first year of Cyrus. Chapters 7 and 8, however, are dated to the first and third years of the reign of Belshazzar. This is significant. In the book of Daniel, chapter 5 relates the events of the last night of Belshazzar and the fall of the Babylonian kingdom. The visions of chapters 7 and 8 make it clear that the Babylonian empire will come to an end. Most clearly, in chapter 8:3 the first animal that Daniel sees is the ram whose two horns are interpreted in v. 20 specifically as "the kings of Media and Persia". In v. 4 "the ram charges westward and northward and southward. All beasts were powerless to withstand it..." Since the Medo-Persian empire immediately followed the Babylonian in the Daniel scheme, the interpreter of chapter 5 had already seen the fall of Babylon in the visions of chapters 7 and 8, some time before having to interpret the writing on the wall. Thus, through the dating given to

²¹ ET *OTP* 2:390; Gr TLG (Schermann's text of Cod. 4,260).

²² This is in part because he is portrayed as not wanting to give the bad news to Nebuchadnezzar who had been a good king to him in the end, but Belshazzar is portrayed as despising all that his 'father' cherished

the times Daniel received the visions, he is given the necessary revelations—his own visions and guided interpretations, so that by the last day of Belshazzar, he had sufficient revealed information to interpret the writing on the wall; with those revelations and his superior intellect (1:17) and ability to solve riddles (5:12, 16), he knows what to make of the words through the use of word plays.²³

Whether the order of the chapters in the OG version of Daniel is original or not, they highlight the fact that the order of the chapters was noted by ancient scribes. The oldest copy of OG, papyrus 967, places chapters 7 and 8 before chapter 5. Although it is pre-Hexaplaric, that is it is a text that was not forced into an alignment with the MT, it is difficult to postulate that chapter 8, which is in Hebrew, came before chapter 5 which is Aramaic.²⁴

Conclusions

Reading the stories in the light of the contiguous context, then, leads us to understand the very same events differently.

In my research on Daniel and the belief in divinely assisted interpretation in the second temple period, I have concluded that the second century group to which the authors/editors of Daniel belonged believed that they were assisted by God when they took prophecies of Isaiah against Assyria and applied them to the Seleucids.²⁵ They took existing stories about Daniel, and through editing they turned a court diviner into a divinely assisted interpreter. Even now, reading chapters 4 and 5 as independent units, we can see the original portrayal of the superior diviner. But, read in context, it is clear that, in the words of Daniel, "... as for me, this mystery

²³ On word-play in the ANE and the Hebrew Bible, see Scott B. Noegel, ed., *Puns and Pundits: Word Play in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature* (Bethesda: CDL, 2000).

²⁴ Both Lust, "Septuagint of Daniel 4-5," 39–53; Munnich, "Texte Massorétique et Septante dans le Livre de Daniel" maintain this. But McLay, "Old Greek Translation of Daniel Chapters 4-6" mounts a significant challenge to this view.

²⁵ Wooden, "The Book of Daniel and Manticism."

has been revealed not because of any wisdom that I have more than any other living being...” (2:30). In this way, the portrayal of Daniel was made consistent over the whole book: in 1–6 we see Daniel as he makes the revealed mysteries known to kings; in 7-12 we see how they were made known to him when he received visions at home and before kings. Thus through the placement of stories, the addition of details, through the arrangement of the timeline, and the use of *leitworten*, stories that portrayed Daniel as simply interpreting without assistance, became stories understood as portraying him being assisted. Thus our perception of what Daniel does in chapters 4 and 5 is changed.

In all of this, the issue of intention is problematic. Indeed, in these stories, evidence is mixed: on the one hand, there is ample evidence that the stories were altered over time, and links were made in newer material (e.g., 2:20-33) to older material (e.g., chapter 5). But, the question can be asked, why not actually change details in chapters 4 and 5 to make it abundantly clear that Daniel received revelations? It seems that the most we can say is that the later authors-editors assumed revelatory experiences when they read the stories, and so they had no need to alter significantly the actual stories; but they did provide clarifications elsewhere. We can at the least say that their presuppositions about what happened crept in. Whether they assumed revelatory experiences in the existing stories or felt the need to alter the stories, in the end the result is the same: the reader’s/hearer’s perception of what Daniel does is changed when the stories are read in their present context.

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