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Secrecy, Textual Legitimation, and Intercultural Polemics in the Book of Daniel

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AFTER OFFERING AN INTRODUCTION to the term used for “secret” in the Book of Daniel and a brief consideration of Daniel’s setting in a foreign court in order to appreciate the role of secret knowledge in Mesopotamian scholarship, I seek here to answer a single question: How does secrecy function in the Book of Daniel? Surprisingly, secrecy is not, as might be expected, directly attached to the apocalyptic content of the book (chaps. 7–12). Rather, secrecy is almost exclusively the concern of chap. 2 and primarily characterizes there the Israelite deity and, by extension, the book’s mediator of divine knowledge, Daniel. As it pertains to Daniel as mediator, secrecy is, therefore, preparatory in the same way that, for example, Moses’ call is preparatory to his reception of the Torah. That is, secrecy in Daniel 2 provides a method of characterization and authorization of the chosen mediator and thereby legitimates the revelatory material he receives later in chaps. 7–12. This positive characterization of Daniel is enhanced also by way of contrast with the utter failure of the Babylonian scholars, the self-proclaimed keepers of the “secret of the gods,” to perceive divine secrets.

Investigating the function of secrecy in the Book of Daniel, therefore, creates a unique opportunity to examine the manner in which a textually self-conscious corpus of material in the Hebrew Bible provides legitimation for its revelatory claims.¹ In fact, studying the Book of Daniel from this perspective is doubly unique

¹ For the textual self-awareness of the Book of Daniel, see Philip R. Davies, “Reading Daniel Sociologically,” in *The Book of Daniel in the Light of New Findings* (ed. A. S. van der Woude; BETL 106; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993) 345-61, here 352-55.

in canonical biblical literature because the book explicitly invokes secrecy as part of its rhetoric of legitimation and it does so with a clear intercultural polemical intent.²

I. The Term רז

In order to get our bearings in this material and to approach it with an appropriate conceptual framework, I begin with an overview of the word רז, the most important term used in the Book of Daniel to designate the idea of secrecy, and its relationship to the term סוד. A Persian loanword into Aramaic and Hebrew, רז is attested only nine times with certainty in the Hebrew Bible, all of which occur in the Book of Daniel:³ רז (4:6), רזא (2:18, 19, 27, 30, 47),⁴ רזין (2:28, 47), and רזיא (2:29).⁵

² For a somewhat different treatment of secrecy and Daniel 2 in light of Mesopotamian materials, see Jack N. Lawson, “‘The God Who Reveals Secrets’: The Mesopotamian Background to Daniel 2:47,” *JSOT* 74 (1997) 61-76.

³ See *HALOT*, 1980-81 for a recent lexicographical treatment, and, for the word’s Persian background, Shaul Shaked, “Esoteric Trends in Zoroastrianism,” *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 3 (1969) 175-221, here 193 and 206-13. The term’s attestation in Isa 24:16aβ (ואמר רזיילי רזיילי) is likely, in my opinion, but disputed. It need not concern us further in this context.

⁴ In fact, the determined form is spelled רזה in all but v. 30.

⁵ רז is attested also frequently in Qumran literature, in the targums, and in other Jewish texts. רז at Qumran has been the subject of many studies, the most recent of which is Samuel I. Thomas, “The ‘Mysteries’ of the Qumran Community: The *Raz*-Concept in Second Temple Judaism and in the Dead Sea Scrolls” (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 2007; available from University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, MI). See also Markus Bockmuehl, *Revelation and Mystery in Ancient Judaism and Pauline Christianity* (WUNT 36; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1990; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 53-56 and n. 71. In light of the discussion presented later in this section, it is interesting that contra Bockmuehl, for example, Guy Couturier (“La vision du conseil divin: Étude d’une forme commune au prophétisme et à l’apocalyptique,” *ScEs* 36 [1984] 5-43, here 38-41), believes that סוד and רז are synonymous in the Qumran texts. Note especially the substitution of רז where, according to Couturier, one should expect to see סוד in 1QpHab 7.4-5, a text he believes is alluding to Amos 3:7. See also the two terms in parallel in 1QH^a 19.9-10. For several representative citations of רז in the targums and later rabbinic/Jewish material, see Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (2 vols. in 1; New York: Judaica, 1992) 1464; Jacob Levy, *Wörterbuch über die Talmudim und Midraschim* (4 vols.; repr., Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963) 4. 437; Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period* (Dictionaries of Talmud, Midrash and Targum 2; Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University, 1990) 520; and Gerd A. Wewers, *Geheimnis und Geheimhaltung im rabbinischen Judentum* (Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten 25; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1975) 191-97. See Bockmuehl (*Revelation and Mystery*, 95-96) for a brief treatment of the term’s use in various targumic texts at Gen 49:1 and Num 24:3. Interestingly, רז translates סוד in the targum of Jer 6:11; 15:17; and Prov 3:32 (so Heinz-Dieter Neef, *Gottes himmlischer Thronrat: Hintergrund und Bedeutung von sôd JHWH im Alten Testament* [Arbeiten zur Theologie 79;

Based on its appearances in the Danielic context, רז may be defined as secret information that only the deity knows but which God voluntarily distributes to chosen individuals.⁶ It is significant that the term is very frequently accompanied by the verbal root גלה, “to reveal” (2:19, 28, 29, 30, 47[2x]). Given the semantic components of secrecy and revelation, there is warrant to compare רז to the Hebrew word סוד, especially as the latter is used in Amos 3:7 to characterize prophetic knowledge:⁷

כי לא יעשה אדני יהוה דבר כי אם־גלה סודו אל־עבדיו הנביאים

For Lord Yhwh does nothing unless he has revealed his secret to his servants, the prophets.

Although סוד can designate an exclusive group or the plan arising from such a group, the word can also simply mean “secret,” as it does in several biblical wisdom texts (e.g., Prov 11:13; 20:19; and 25:9). When it has this particular meaning, I suggest that it is virtually synonymous with רז.⁸ The word’s usage elsewhere confirms this semantic overlap. Note, for example, Sir 8:17-18, where the two terms occur together:

עם פותה אל תסתייד כי לא יוכל לכסות סודך
לפני זר אל תעש רז כי לא תדע מה ילד ספּוֹרִי

Do not associate yourself with a fool,
for he will not be able to hide your private plan.
Before a stranger do not do (anything) secret,
for you do not know what its end will bring forth.

Moreover, in Sir 12:11-12, רז fills the slot usually occupied by סוד in similarly phrased proverbs. Compare the following:

Stuttgart: Calwer, 1994] 49). רז occurs also in the Aramaic fragments of *1 Enoch* 8:3, for which see Thomas, “‘Mysteries’ of the Qumran Community,” 89-95.

⁶ See Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39: A new translation with introduction and commentary* (AB 19; New York: Doubleday, 2000) 355, which shaped the above definition.

⁷ Some interpreters, however, define רז explicitly in contrast to the usage of סוד. See, e.g., Ina Willi-Plein, “Das Geheimnis der Apokalyptik,” *VT* 27 (1977) 62-81, here 71 and 73, where רז is specifically contrasted with סוד in Amos 3:7; and Bockmuehl, *Revelation and Mystery*, 15-16, who affirms Willi-Plein’s idea that רז, unlike סוד, is ultimately “ein statischer Begriff” (p. 16 n. 55). But this analysis confuses a major part of the semantic domain of סוד, which is admittedly broader than and different from that of רז, with its entire semantic domain.

⁸ For illustrative purposes, one could note the much more distant equation of the two terms in Edna Laudén, Liora Weinbach, and Miriam Shani, *Multi-Dictionary: Bilingual Learners Dictionary: Hebrew–English; English–Hebrew* (Tel Aviv: AD, 1989) 625, a Modern Hebrew dictionary in which סוד occurs as a definition for רז.

Prov 20:19:

גולה־סוד הולך רכיל ולפתה שפתיו לא תתערב

One who goes about slandering reveals a secret; do not get involved with a senseless chatterer.

Prov 11:13:

הולך רכיל מגלה־סוד ונאמן־רוח מכסה דבר

One who goes about slandering reveals a secret, but a trusted spirit covers up a matter.

Sir 12:11-12:

אל תאמין בשוֹנא לעד
היה לו כמגלה רז: ולא ימצא להשחיתך¹⁰

Do not trust in an enemy for a witness . . .
Treat him as one who reveals a secret,
so he may not find (a way) to destroy you.¹¹

In view of the similar uses of רז and סוד in all of the above passages—passages that concern secrecy in the human realm—it is reasonable to conclude that the two terms are similar also in their use with regard to the divine realm.¹²

⁹ The text follows Ms. A; see Pancratius C. Beentjes, *The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew: A Text Edition of All Extant Hebrew Manuscripts and a Synopsis of All Parallel Hebrew Ben Sira Texts* (VTSup 68; Leiden: Brill, 1997) 32. Throughout the present study, I cite all ancient texts both in the original language and in my own translation except for those from Daniel 1 and 2. For these, in order to save space, I give only my translation.

¹⁰ Ms. A; see Beentjes, *Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew*, 39.

¹¹ According to one reconstruction, the same usage may be attested in a fifth-century papyrus of Aḥiqar (restored in line 141), which reads: [רז]יך אלתגלי קדם [רח]מיך [ו]אליקל שמך קדמיהם: “Do not reveal your secrets to your friends, so your name is not denigrated (that is, lightly esteemed) by them” (A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1923] 217 [text], 224 [translation], and 243 [notes]). See, however, Bezalel Porten and Ada Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt: Newly Copied, Edited, and Translated into Hebrew and English*, vol. 3, *Literature, Accounts, Lists* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Department of the History of the Jewish People, 1993) 42; they restore the beginning of the line with [מסתר]יך, “your secrets,” or [הטא]יך, “your sins.”

¹² See John E. Goldingay, *Daniel* (WBC 30; Dallas: Word, 1989) 55, who correctly sees that the background of רז גלה lies in “human experience of keeping and sharing confidence or secrets,” citing Prov 11:13; 20:19; 25:9; Sir 8:18; and 12:11 for support. “This experience,” he writes with reference to Amos 3:7, “is applied to a prophet’s being allowed to share in Yahweh’s secret purpose.” See also Louis F. Hartman and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel: A new translation with notes and commentary* (AB 23; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978) 139; and Patrick W. Skehan and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira: A new translation with notes* (AB 39; New York: Doubleday, 1987) 214.

Thus, we may consider זר in Daniel to be a semantic variation on the use of סוד in Amos 3:7: both indicate the content of secret, exclusive divine knowledge that only the deity can (and does) reveal. If this is so, this semantic discussion confirms a rather traditional idea about Daniel: he enjoys prophetic privilege. Although recognizing the similarity of the two terms and the implication of the similarity, we must also be careful to observe an important difference: in keeping with the apocalyptic character of the book, the use of זר in Daniel contributes to an eschatological perspective that is absent from Amos 3:7.¹³

II. Daniel as Court Scholar

Although the stories in Daniel 1–6 probably originated separately in the eastern Diaspora and thus have a diverse background in both oral and written forms, they appear to have been brought together to exemplify how Jews in exile could survive, even prosper, by accommodating themselves to their new, foreign environment without, at the same time, compromising their religious integrity.¹⁴ Because all of the stories have a court setting, they are often called “court tales,” or perhaps better, “court legends.”¹⁵ As is well known, these court legends recount the amazing exploits of four Hebrew captives at the courts of various Mesopotamian and Persian kings during the exile. Most prominent among the Hebrew captives is, of course, Daniel.¹⁶ He is introduced in chap. 1 as one of the young Hebrew men of highest caliber selected to undergo training in the language and literature of the Babylonians (1:3–4, 6), and his commitment to integrity and his extraordinary wisdom always result in his exaltation among his peers (see 1:19–20; 2:48; 4:8; 5:29; 6:28).¹⁷

¹³ In Dan 2:28, the deity’s revealing of secrets (i.e., the content of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream) is explicitly linked to the אחרית ימיא , “the end of days.” See John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 159; Goldingay, *Daniel*, 56; and Willi-Plein, “Das Geheimnis der Apokalyptik,” 69, 73, for the eschatological character of the secrets in Daniel 2. Goldingay aptly notes: “(W)hen Amos speaks of God revealing his secret (3:7), he refers to the secret significance of particular events; when Daniel speaks of God revealing his secret, revelation has as its object future history itself viewed as a whole and viewed from its destiny (cf. v. 44)” (*Daniel*, 56). The eschatological idea associated with זר in Daniel, however, is not due simply to the word alone; rather, it is the product of the word’s use *in context*. זר in Daniel is not, therefore, a technical term for “eschatological secret.”

¹⁴ For a general treatment of the “court tales” with reference to the most significant secondary literature, see Collins, *Daniel*, 35–52. As Collins asserts, the tales probably “took on new meaning in the setting of the persecution” of Antiochus Epiphanes and thus are to be interpreted ultimately in light of their juxtaposition alongside the later apocalyptic chaps. 7–12 (p. 60).

¹⁵ Collins, *Daniel*, 45.

¹⁶ According to the text, Daniel serves in the courts of Nebuchadnezzar (chaps. 1–4), Belshazzar (chap. 5), and Darius the Mede (chap. 6). The problems presented by the historical references in the legends, their chronology, and their putative settings are well known. For a representative discussion of the issues, see Hartman and Di Lella, *Daniel*, 29–42, 46–54.

¹⁷ Daniel seems to have been a traditional character of folk legends among the Canaanites

Throughout the court tales, Daniel is presented as a colleague of the Babylonian court wise men (see specifically 1:20; 2:13, 48; 4:7; 5:7, 11).¹⁸ These wise men in the Book of Daniel occupy the same position at the Babylonian court as the Assyrian *ummânû* did at the Assyrian court—scholars who are known quite well from their letters to the Assyrian kings. In fact, Simo Parpola, the editor of the correspondence from Assyrian court scholars to Kings Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal, has suggested that the terms employed to describe the Babylonian wise men in the Book of Daniel (variously listed in 1:20; 2:2, 27; 4:4; 5:11) are often quite similar to the actual terms used in Akkadian to describe the court scholars.¹⁹

Aramaic	Hebrew	Akkadian	
חכימין	חכמים	<i>ummânû</i>	scholars
אשפין	אשפים	<i>āšipû</i>	exorcists
גזרין	ø ²⁰	<i>bārû</i>	haruspices
כשדאין	כשדים ²¹	<i>tupšarrû</i>	astrologers
הרטמין	הרטמים	<i>ḥartibî</i>	interpreters of dreams ²²

(including Israel), associated with great wisdom already in the days of Ezekiel (see Ezek 14:14, 20 and esp. 28:3). For the Canaanite background of this figure, see, e.g., John Day, “The Daniel of Ugarit and Ezekiel and the Hero of the Book of Daniel,” *VT* 30 (1980) 174-84; Day interacts substantially with earlier literature and contrary views.

¹⁸ Daniel is a “mantic sage,” as argued by H.-P. Müller (“Mantische Weisheit und Apokalyp-tik,” in *Congress Volume: Uppsala 1971* [ed. P. A. H. de Boer; VTSup 22; Leiden: Brill, 1972] 268-93, here 276-77), which fits right in with the other Babylonian crafts listed in Daniel 2. For a more recent and nuanced overview of the idea that Daniel is presented as a Mesopotamian court scholar, see Karel van der Toorn, “Scholars at the Oriental Court: The Figure of Daniel Against Its Mesopotamian Background,” in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception* (ed. John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint; VTSup 83.1; Formation and Interpretation of Old Testament Literature 2.1; Leiden: Brill, 2001) 27-54, esp. 38-42. The same idea is adopted and developed in Lawson, ““God Who Reveals Secrets,”” 61-76; and William A. McKane, *Prophets and Wise Men* (SBT 44; London: SCM, 1965) 94-101.

¹⁹ The following list is taken with some modifications from Simo Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal*, part II A, *Introduction and Appendixes* (AOAT 5/2; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1971) 9 (henceforth, *LAS* 2A).

²⁰ Parpola suggests that ברים is the Hebrew equivalent of “haruspices” (*LAS* 2A, 9). But this term does not occur in Daniel and, as he indicates, this suggestion requires a conjectural emendation of ברים in Isa 44:25 and Jer 50:36. *HALOT* does not recognize this conjecture (p. 109 [*בד V]), but see, e.g., McKane (*Prophets and Wise Men*, 94 and n. 4), who accepts it and makes the comparison to the Babylonian scholars.

²¹ Parpola also notes טפטר in Nah 3:17 as relevant (*LAS* 2A, 9).

²² For the Egyptian background of *ḥartibi*, see *CAD* H, 116. Concerning the Aramaic הרטמין and Hebrew הרטמים, see the cautious remarks by Thomas O. Lambdin, “Egyptian Loan Words in the Old Testament,” *JAOS* 73 (1953) 145-55, here 150-51; he proposes to derive the words from

Even the terminology of leadership, **נר** followed by the term for the group being led (see 2:48 and especially 5:11), corresponds to the Akkadian idiom.²³

Looking beyond the terminology to the thematic level, Karel van der Toorn notes that both the court legends in Daniel and the scholarly correspondence from Assyria depict, for example, court intrigue, competition among scholars, frequent and sudden changes in scholars' fortunes, and the kings' suspicions that the scholars are manipulating them. The thematic parallels suggest, as van der Toorn states,

(t)he description of Daniel's career under Kings Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, though historically unreliable, conveys a fair idea of the situation obtaining at the courts in Babylon and Asshur. . . . In various respects . . . the tales about Daniel preserve the atmosphere of the oriental court as it can be reconstructed from the letters of Assyrian and Babylonian scholars.²⁴

Despite these general similarities, however, van der Toorn rightly remarks that the depiction "remains schematic" and thus would not have required—nor does it represent—the author's personal acquaintance with the Babylonian court.²⁵ A significant inaccuracy, for example, is the book's emphasis on dream interpretation. Judging from the Assyrian scholarly correspondence, dream interpretation played a minor role in the day-to-day affairs of the court.²⁶ Thus, as he concludes, "The *couleur locale* of the stories is convincing in its general outline, but falls short when it comes to detail."²⁷

It is important for the interpretation developed below to call attention to one

hry-tp or **hr-db(?)*. Hans Goedicke ("*hartummim*," *Or* n.s. 65 [1996] 24-30) suggests a derivation from *hry-tm*?

²³ See, for example, the usage of Akkadian *rab x* listed in Simo Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars* (State Archives of Assyria 10; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1993) 355 (in the glossary).

²⁴ Van der Toorn, "Scholars at the Oriental Court," 39-40, 41.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

²⁶ See *LAS* 2A, 9; and van der Toorn, "Scholars at the Oriental Court," 41-42. With van der Toorn, I dismiss the unlikely possibility that dream interpretation may have been prominent at the Babylonian court in contrast to the Assyrian court. For a recent review of the quite limited evidence for dream interpreters and interpretation in the Assyrian letters and royal inscriptions (especially those of Ashurbanipal), see Beate Pongratz-Leisten, *Herrschaftswissen in Mesopotamien: Formen der Kommunikation zwischen Gott und König im 2. und 1. Jahrtausend v.Chr.* (State Archives of Assyria Studies 10; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1999) 111-21.

²⁷ Van der Toorn, "Scholars at the Oriental Court," 41. As already mentioned with regard to the dream interpreters, the Book of Daniel does not accurately represent the scholarly crafts as found in the Assyrian correspondence. There are both omissions and additions in Daniel. For example, the *asû* and *kalû* are both missing from the biblical book, and neither the **הרטמים/הרטמין** ("dream interpreters") nor the **מכשפים** ("sorcerers") appear in the Assyrian scholarly correspondence as a professional group (see Dan 2:2). The only Assyrian document that presents dream interpreters as official functionaries of the state connects them to a covenant-making ceremony (see F. M. Fales and

particular, well-known element of this “court scholar” background, namely, that the Mesopotamian scholars were closely associated with secrecy. A royal inscription from the reign of Nabonidus, for example, calls the Babylonian scholars those “who guard the secret of the great gods”:

32. . . . *upahḥir-ma šībūt āli mārī Bābili tuṣšarrū mināti*
 33. *enqūtu āšib bīt mummu nāsir pirišti ilī rabūti mukīn paraš šarrūti . . . puḥur mārī ummānī . . .*

I gathered the elders of the city, the citizens of Babylon, the architects, (and) the learned, who dwell in the temple academy, who guard the secret of the great gods, who maintain the rite of kingship . . . the assembly of the scholars . . .²⁸

What has not been sufficiently recognized among biblical scholars, however, is that the traditional Mesopotamian scholarly crafts—the entire textual corpora of exorcism (*āšipūtu*), medicine (*asūtu*), divination (*bārūtu*), ritual lamentation (*kalūtu*), and astrology (*tuppšarrūtu*)—were secret documents. Scribal scholars indicated this status by explicitly using the words “secret” or “secret of the gods” (with variants) in their descriptions of the textual corpora and by attempting to restrict access to the learned material by means of written statements on the tablets that bore the texts.²⁹

With regard to the former method, the following descriptions of the medical and lamentation corpora are attested:³⁰

144. *Ea ina Apsī nēmeqšu igmura*
 145. *qan tuppū ina qātēšu išruka*
 146. *asūtu pirištu ilī ana qātēya ummani*

Ea fully endowed me with his wisdom from the *Apsu*.
 He gave me the tablet stylus from his hands.

The physicians’ corpus, the secret of the gods, he made my responsibility.³¹

J. N. Postgate, *Imperial Administrative Records*, part 1, *Palace and Temple Administration* [State Archives of Assyria 7; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1992] text no. 1).

²⁸ The text is VAB 4 256 i 32-33. For a convenient and recent treatment of the text, see Paul-Alain Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon 556–539 B.C.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 7.

²⁹ See Alan Lenzi, “The Secret of the Gods and Society: Studies in the Origins, Guarding, and Disclosure of Secret Knowledge in Ancient Mesopotamia and Biblical Israel” (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, February 2006; available from University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, MI) 115-56. (This study is now published as *Secrecy and the Gods: Secret Knowledge in Ancient Mesopotamia and Biblical Israel* [State Archives of Assyria Studies 19; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2008]).

³⁰ For a discussion of these two texts, see Lenzi, *Secrecy and the Gods*, 95-100.

³¹ For the text edition, see W. G. Lambert, “The Gula Hymn of Bulluṣa-rabi,” *Or* 36 (1967) 105-32, specifically 124-25 for the lines cited above. For a different translation, see Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the Muses* (3rd ed.; Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2005) 589. Gula, a goddess, is speaking,

13. *nēmeq Ea kalûta niširti apkalli* 14. *ša ana nuḥ libbi ilī rabûti šûluku*
 15. *kī pī tuppāni gabarī māt Aššur u māt Akkade* 16. *ina tuppāni aštur asniq*
abrē-ma

I wrote on tablets, collated, (and) checked the wisdom from Ea, the lamentation corpus, the secret of the sage, which is suitable for appeasing the heart of the great gods, according to the original tablet of the land of Ashur and the land of Akkade . . .³²

The fact that Ea, god of wisdom, is mentioned in both of these texts strengthens the association of the scholarly corpora with secrecy, since Ea himself was closely connected to the idea. For example, an Old Babylonian lexical list equates the Sumerian *ḫal.an.kù*, “secret of the pure heaven,” with Akkadian *Apsûm*, Ea’s subterranean watery domain;³³ Ea’s sanctuary in Marduk’s temple in Babylon (Esagil) was called *é.ḫal.an.ki*, “House of the Secrets of Heaven and Earth”;³⁴ and an Old Babylonian royal inscription from Malgium attests *bēl pirišti*, “lord of the secret,” as one of Ea’s epithets.³⁵

As for the latter method of indicating secrecy, scribal notices are sometimes found on individual tablets containing material associated with the learned corpora. One such notice is what I have called elsewhere a “secrecy label,” that is, a statement usually located in the tablet’s colophon that indicated the contents of the tablet as a “secret of the gods” (*pirišti ilī*), “secret of the (antediluvian) sage” (*pirišti apkalli*), “secret of the scholar” (*niširti ummāni*), or some other, related variant.³⁶ The so-called *Geheimwissen* colophon is another written notice that scholars used to attempt to restrict access to scholarly texts; it sometimes occurs in conjunction with the secrecy label.³⁷ Although there are several variations within this colophon type, the following text is a representative example:

but it is very likely that the final human recipients of the divine knowledge are indicated by means of wordplay with the verb in the last line: *umanni* (literally, “he delivered”)/*ummānū* (“scholars”).

³² For this text, see conveniently Hermann Hunger, *Babylonische und assyrische Kolophone* (AOAT 2; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1968) #328 (Ashurbanipal type o).

³³ See Miguel Civil, *Ea A = nāqu, Aa A = nāqu, with Their Forerunners and Related Texts* (with collaboration of Margaret W. Green and Wilfred G. Lambert; Materials for the Sumerian Lexicon 14; Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1979) 142:18.

³⁴ See A. R. George, *House Most High: The Temples of Ancient Mesopotamia* (Mesopotamian Civilizations 5; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1993) 98, entry #449.

³⁵ See Douglas Frayne, *Old Babylonian Period (2003–1595 BC)* (Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia Early Periods 4; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990) 669-70.

³⁶ See Lenzi, *Secrecy and the Gods*, 170-86, for numerous examples.

³⁷ See *ibid.*, 186-219, for a treatment of the *Geheimwissen* colophons in Mesopotamian scholarly texts.

26. *pirišti ilī rabūti mūdū mūdā likallim lā mūdū ayy-inmar*

27. *[ik]kib ilī rabūti*

Secret of the great gods. The expert [literally, “one who knows”] may show an(other) expert. A non-expert may not see [i.e., read] it. A restriction of the great gods.³⁸

By their own witness, the Mesopotamian scholars were *the* experts in secret matters pertaining to the proper interaction of humans and deities, and they were the custodians of written texts that claimed to be the “secret of the gods.” If anyone in Mesopotamia was equipped to deal with a divine secret, these were the persons.

With a keener appreciation of the importance of scholars and their secret textual corpora in the Mesopotamian courts, I now approach the literary issue of secrecy in the Book of Daniel.

III. The Function of Secrecy in the Book of Daniel

It is an underappreciated fact among interpreters that 𐤀𐤁 occurs almost exclusively in Daniel 2 (eight of nine attestations). My interpretation of secrecy in the Book of Daniel, therefore, will focus on this chapter.³⁹ To put the distribution of 𐤀𐤁 into a more meaningful perspective, however, we must also take into account two “firsts” that occur in chap. 2, namely, the first time that Daniel receives revelation from the Hebrew deity and the first time that he bests his Babylonian colleagues. Concerning this second item, Dan 1:20 has already prepared the reader for

³⁸ See Alisdair Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea* (State Archives of Assyria 3; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1989) 102, for this colophon, which is attached to a scholarly explanatory compendium concerned, among other things, with interpreting several elements of the *Enuma Elish*.

³⁹ Although the chapter is probably not an original unity (for example, vv. 13-23 are frequently taken to be a secondary insertion, for which see Collins, *Daniel*, 153; John J. Collins, *Daniel with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature* [FOTL 20; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984] 49; Hartman and Di Lella, *Daniel*, 139; and E. W. Heaton, *The Book of Daniel: Introduction and Commentary* [Torch Bible Commentaries; London: SCM, 1956] 128; for the contrary view, see Norman W. Porteous, *Daniel: A Commentary* [OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965] 43), I will only note diachronic issues as they assist in the interpretation of secrecy. One issue that we may dispatch here is this: If Daniel was a court scholar, why is he not mentioned in 2:1-12 along with the rest of his Babylonian colleagues when Nebuchadnezzar poses the challenge to them? Collins (*Daniel*, 158), crediting Jerome for identifying the problem, solves it by assuming that Daniel was not one of the wise men in the original version of the story. He was probably simply one of the Judean youths from the exile who heard about the conundrum and came forward to solve it (v. 24). The redactor who decided to open the book with what is now chap. 1 and the eventual insertion of vv. 13-23 into chap. 2 created this problem. Despite such a narrative fissure, the story as a whole still manages to give the reader the impression that Daniel is one of the court wise men.

Daniel's success throughout the rest of the book, for there we read about Daniel and his three Hebrew friends that

(In) every matter of wisdom (and)⁴⁰ understanding which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the dream interpreters (and) exorcists in his whole kingdom.

A. *Daniel's First Revelation*

As is well known, Daniel 2 begins with King Nebuchadnezzar having a dream that troubles him. He calls in his court wise men for consultation about the dream. But instead of simply describing the dream and seeking their interpretation, he demands that they tell him both the dream and the interpretation—even threatening their lives if they fail to do so (vv. 1-9).⁴¹ Having now set up the story's problem, the author foreshadows its very solution by putting the following words in the mouths of Daniel's Babylonian colleagues:

(10) The astrologers answered the king and said, "There is no man upon the earth able to make known the king's matter, because no king great and powerful⁴² has requested a thing like this of any dream interpreter, exorcist, or astrologer. (11) The matter that the king is requesting is (too) difficult; there is no other who will make it known to the king except the gods whose dwelling is not with (mortal) flesh."

The Babylonian colleagues do not actually mention the word "secrecy" in their reply, but their response certainly reflects an acknowledgment that the king's request is beyond all human and earthly powers—which significantly must also include their own (see below). With this statement, of course, they prepare the way for the introduction of one who can tap the heavens for an answer from the one who reveals the impossible: enter Daniel and the Hebrew deity.

When Daniel hears about the challenge and Nebuchadnezzar's resolve to enforce the penalty attached to his demand, he, unlike his Babylonian colleagues, puts himself at risk by asking the king for more time to discover the matter.⁴³ He then does the only reasonable thing in such a circumstance (as even the Babylonians admitted in vv. 10-11): he turns to his deity for help.

⁴⁰ Some of the versions support the copula's presence in the text (see *BHS*, 1382 n. 20a-a).

⁴¹ For an interpretation of Daniel 2 in the broader context of dreams in the Hebrew Bible (with much comparative material included), see the classic study of Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich, *Der Traum im Alten Testament* (BZAW 73; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1953) 90-113.

⁴² שְׂלִיט may also be taken as a noun (see v. 15), meaning "ruler" (see, e.g., Goldingay, *Daniel*, 30; and *NJPSV*), but the adjective seems more appropriate here (see, e.g., Collins, *Daniel*, 149; Hartman and Di Lella, *Daniel*, 134; Otto Plöger, *Das Buch Daniel* [KAT 18; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1965] 46 n. 10c; and *RSV*).

⁴³ The inconsistency between Daniel being granted a time extension in v. 16 and the king's impatience with the Babylonian wise men in v. 8, even accusing them of trying to buy time, is one of the reasons for seeing vv. 13-23 as a secondary development. See n. 39 above.

(17) Then Daniel went home and informed Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah about the situation (so they could) (18) seek mercy from the god of the heavens⁴⁴ concerning this secret, in order that Daniel and his friends would not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.

The first attestation of זר in the chapter appears abrupt or even uncalled for, since it seems to refer only to the king's unknown dream and its interpretation, an item designated earlier in the chapter rather blandly with מלכה (2:10, 17; see also v. 28).⁴⁵ But this first appearance of זר to describe the unknown dream amplifies the necessity of the revelation anticipated in vv. 10-11 and foreshadows its granting in v. 19a. As presented in v. 19a, however, the act of revelation is underwhelming, for the text quite plainly states, "Then the secret was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night." The secret here remains undefined and thus unknown to the reader; and the agent of revelation is veiled behind the passive grammatical construction in v. 19a (גלי "the secret was revealed").⁴⁶ Yet what is perfectly clear in v. 19a—and unusual for a story about a wise courtier⁴⁷—is that Daniel is *not* responsible for the secret's discovery; he is a passive recipient. This puts vv. 19b-23 all the more in relief, for it is there that Daniel recognizes the source of the secret.

In v. 19b, having received the information he sought, Daniel does the very same thing that he did when he needed the information in v. 18: he turns to the deity. But this time he does so to give praise:

- (20) May the divine name be blessed, forever and ever,
for wisdom and power belong to him.
(21) He changes times and seasons;
he removes and establishes kings.
He gives wisdom to the wise,
and knowledge to those who know understanding.
(22) He reveals unfathomable (עמיקתא) and hidden things (מסתרתא).⁴⁸

⁴⁴ For the phrase "god of the heavens," see n. 49 below.

⁴⁵ See likewise Collins, *Daniel*, 159, who explains the use of זר here as foreshadowing the eschatological nature of the dream's content. Without denying the point about foreshadowing, I think that this overloads זר .

⁴⁶ James A. Montgomery's comment on the impersonal use of ידע in v. 30, "it appropriately here veils the mysterious agency," applies to the passive voice in v. 19a as well (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* [ICC; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1927] 164-65).

⁴⁷ Susan Niditch and Robert Doran ("The Success Story of the Wise Courtier: A Formal Approach," *JBL* 96 [1977] 179-93, here 190-92) note that 2:17-23 and the whole issue of divine help—both asking for and receiving it—marks Daniel 2 out as a distinctive development within the "wise courtier"-type tale.

⁴⁸ Both מסתרתא and עמיקתא occur only here in Biblical Aramaic. מסתרתא clearly indicates something that is secret (so Theodotianic Dan 2:22, ἀπόκρυφα , "hidden," and Old Greek Dan 2:22, σκατεινά , "obscure"), and thus recalls the cognate נסתרות in Deut 29:28. Gabriele Boccaccini (*Roots of Rabbinic Judaism: An Intellectual History, from Ezekiel to Daniel* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,

He knows what lies in darkness,
 and light dwells with him.
 (23) I thank and praise you, O god of my fathers,
 for you have given me wisdom and power.
 And now you have made known to me that which we sought from you,
 for you have made known to us the matter of the king.

The implication of the doxology is clear. As anticipated by Daniel himself in v. 18 and his Babylonian colleagues in vv. 10-11, only a deity could reveal such a secret, and that deity is clearly identified as the Hebrew god of the heavens, Yhwh.⁴⁹ “Daniel’s success,” as C. L. Seow notes, “is due neither to his personal gifts nor to his Chaldean education, but to the wisdom and the power of God alone.”⁵⁰ Daniel recognizes this fact in v. 20 when he affirms that “wisdom and power” belong to the deity. Then he goes on to affirm that it is the deity’s prerogative to distribute both (v. 21). But in v. 23 Daniel also realizes that the deity has made *him* a possessor of these attributes; *Daniel* now possesses wisdom and power. In other words, Daniel himself recognizes what the narrator has already affirmed in 1:20: he has a special divine endowment of wisdom that has given him social power among his peers. Thus, on the one hand, it is no surprise that Yhwh would reveal unfathomable and hidden things to him, things like the king’s challenge

2002] 175) suggests that the word is related to the use of מִסְתַּרִי in Sir 4:18, which reports Wisdom as saying גַּלִּיתִי לוֹ מִסְתַּרִי, “and I reveal to him my secrets” (see Beentjes, *Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew*, 25, Ms. A; the Greek has τὰ κρύπτα). As for עֲמִיקָתָא, both Greek versions of Daniel translate the term literally with βάθρα, “deep.” The related term עֲמִיק occurs in later Aramaic with the meaning “profound” (see Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1088). Derivatives of the related root in Hebrew, עֲמַק, including עֲמִיק (Isa 33:19 and Ezek 3:5, 6) and עֲמִיקָה (Job 12:22; Prov 18:4; 20:5; Ps 64:7; and Qoh 7:24), frequently refer to things that are profound or difficult to understand. עֲמִיק in Job 12:22 is especially relevant here, as this context shares many affinities with Dan 2:20-23 (noted, for example, by Collins, *Daniel*, 160). Job says that the deity צִלְמוֹת לְאֹרֶךְ צִלְמוֹת וַיִּצַּא לְאֹרֶךְ צִלְמוֹת, “reveals deep things from darkness, and brings deep darkness out to the light.” Given the cognate evidence, עֲמִיקָתָא in Dan 2:22 should be understood as something so profound that it is intellectually inaccessible apart from divine assistance. *HALOT* suggests the translation “unfathomable ideas” (p. 1951).

⁴⁹ The phrase “god of the heavens” is mainly a Persian-period epithet for the Hebrew deity (see, e.g., Collins, *Daniel*, 159; and Montgomery, *Daniel*, 158), but it may also be a circumlocution for the Tetragrammaton (as suggested by Goldingay, *Daniel*, 47).

⁵⁰ C. L. Seow, “From Mountain to Mountain: The Reign of God in Daniel 2,” in *A God So Near: Essays on Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller* (ed. Brent A. Strawn and Nancy R. Bowen; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003) 355-74, here 359. The idea is echoed by nearly all interpreters. Seow also rightly emphasizes that Daniel’s success (and his Babylonian colleagues’ failure) develops an important theme in Second Isaiah: Yhwh’s perfect foreknowledge and ever-effective word in contrast to the absolute powerlessness, failure, and lies of the pagan gods (that is, idols). He cites Isa 44:25-26a; 47:5-15 (with special attention to vv. 10, 13-14); 45:3; and 48:6, among others. See also, e.g., I. Fröhlich, “Daniel 2 and Deutero-Isaiah,” in *The Book of Daniel in the Light of New Findings* (ed. van der Woude), 266-70; and Goldingay, *Daniel*, 35-36.

(v. 30); but significantly, on the other hand, it is to Daniel's credit that he acknowledges and praises the deity here (and elsewhere in the book) for doing so.⁵¹

Daniel 2:18-23 has significant influence on the characterization of Daniel in the book because it is our hero's first experience with divine revelation. Without a doubt, these verses show Daniel to be a worthy recipient of divine communication.

But the story is not over. Daniel may know the secret and thus have solved the problem, but he must still face the king to resolve the crisis. The next scene, therefore, describes Daniel seeking Nebuchadnezzar's audience to tell him the dream and its interpretation. After arriving at court, the king asks Daniel if he is in fact able to do this feat—a question that is certainly a setup for Daniel to make a public confession of what he has already affirmed in private. Daniel replies as follows:

(27) The secret that the king asks, no wise men, exorcists, dream interpreters, or diviners are able to make known to the king. (28) But there is a god in heaven who reveals secrets, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in the future. This is your dream and the visions of your head upon your bed:⁵² (29) As for you, O king, upon your bed came your thoughts⁵³ (concerning) what will be after this, and the revealer of secrets made known to you what will be. (30) As for me, this secret was revealed to me not through wisdom that is in me more than all (other) living creatures, but so that the interpretation may be made known to the king and that you may understand⁵⁴ the thoughts of your heart.

Daniel denies the ability of humans—specifically, the court scholars (see below)—to divine the secret (v. 27) and twice affirms that his deity is the source of the revelation (vv. 28, 29). But Daniel's deity does not just happen to reveal this secret in this one particular instance. Rather, Daniel *characterizes* the Hebrew deity as a “revealer of secrets”; revelation of secret or hidden things is one of this deity's *defining* attributes. When Daniel addresses his own role in the revelatory event, he

⁵¹ Distinguishing between the narrator's voice and Daniel's in 2:19-23, Danna Nolan Fewell (*Circle of Sovereignty: A Story of Stories in Daniel 1–6* [JSOTSup 72; Bible and Literature Series 20; Sheffield: Almond, 1988] 54) notes that the narrator does not introduce the deity as a character in v. 19a but hides the deity behind the passive יָלַל, “was revealed.” The narrator waits and describes the deity's revelatory activity through Daniel's thanksgiving hymn, that is, with Daniel's own voice, in 2:19b-23. This literary presentation highlights Daniel's characterization as an intimate of the deity.

⁵² Because of the repetition in vv. 28 and 29, many commentators consider these two verses to be doublets (so, e.g., Collins, *Daniel*, 162; Hartman and Di Lella, *Daniel*, 140; Goldingay, *Daniel*, 44; and Montgomery, *Daniel*, 162). Despite recognizing the doublet, I see no solid basis for accepting one as more original than the other.

⁵³ I am reading the plural here, for which see Collins, *Daniel*, 150 n. 76; and BHS, 1384 n. 29c.

⁵⁴ See HALOT, 1888 (and, e.g., the RSV) for this translation of נִתְּנָהּ.

again recognizes himself as a passive recipient and self-effacingly disavows any special or inherent abilities. This subordinate role of the wise man in a “wise courtier”—type tale is unique to Daniel 2. Susan Niditch and Robert Doran note that “[a]s Dan 2 now stands, the role of the hero, the wise man, is almost superseded by a more important protagonist, God.”⁵⁵ But Daniel’s subordination to the deity actually works to exalt him among humans, for through it he is proven worthy and thereby legitimated as a receiver of divine communication.

After describing and interpreting the dream, the narrative again takes opportunity to aggrandize the Hebrew deity, but this time the praise comes from the mouth of the astounded Babylonian king:

The king answered Daniel and said, “Truly, your⁵⁶ god is god of gods and lord of lords and a revealer of secrets, since you were able to reveal this secret.” (v. 47)

Nebuchadnezzar attests to the primacy of the Hebrew deity over all others. But more significant for my purpose here, he also describes the deity with that which I interpreted earlier in vv. 27-30 as one of the deity’s defining elements—as a revealer of secrets. Moreover, Nebuchadnezzar recognizes and praises the one who possesses this attribute for precisely the same reason that Daniel did: because a secret was revealed to Daniel. Again we see that the primary credit is given to Yhwh, but likewise Daniel is recognized as the human agent—note the active verbs in this case—through which the divine agent acts. Both the divine source and human agent stand together.

As the above interpretation has shown, secrecy functions primarily to characterize the Hebrew deity. Yet it also functions to affirm Daniel as the recipient of secret divine knowledge. Because of his recognition of human limitation, reliance on divine assistance, and self-subordination when divine revelation is received, Daniel proves himself a worthy recipient of divine communication. In fact, despite the deity’s prominence throughout the chapter as the revealer of secrets, John J. Collins rightly observes that in the broader redaction of the book “the tale serves primarily to establish Daniel’s status as a recipient of heavenly revelation.”⁵⁷

Daniel’s establishment as a secret revealer in chap. 2 is confirmed later in the book when secrecy is attached to him again. After Daniel’s absence from the text in chap. 3, Nebuchadnezzar describes Daniel’s abilities in 4:6 with this statement: “I know that a holy divine spirit is in you and that no secret is too difficult for you” (אנה ידעת די רוח אלהין קדישין בך וכל רז לא־אנס לך). The first phrase is common in the court legends in chaps. 4 and 5 (see 4:5, 15; 5:11, 14),⁵⁸ but the second one

⁵⁵ Niditch and Doran, “Success Story of the Wise Courtier,” 191.

⁵⁶ The plural pronominal suffix refers to Daniel and his three friends.

⁵⁷ Collins, *Daniel with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*, 53.

⁵⁸ On the translation of the phrase, see the interesting suggestion in Bob Becking, “‘A Divine Spirit Is in You’: Notes on the Translation of the Phrase *rûah ʿelāhîn* in Daniel 5,14 and Related

mentioning secrecy is unique. Given the fact that this is the very next appearance of Daniel in the book, it seems that 4:6 is an intentional reminder of Daniel's role in chap. 2. The text, it seems, is reestablishing the role of its main character as a secret revealer after his brief absence.

In terms of the Book of Daniel as a whole, Daniel 2 (and 4:6) establishes a very important foundation that the later apocalyptic sections of the book (chaps. 7–12) can assume and hence build upon: namely, the deity *does* reveal secret knowledge to humans and the worthy human recipient is Daniel, who of course speaks for the author(s) of the book.⁵⁹ Although the apocalyptic content in the later chapters of the book is never explicitly labeled a secret, the activity of the Hebrew deity here in chap. 2 (who also does the revealing in chaps. 7–12) and the characterization of Daniel here (who also does the receiving of revelation in chaps. 7–12) implicitly attach themselves and thus secrecy to the entire book.⁶⁰ This would be confirmed for the traditional audience by the injunctions in 8:26 and 12:4, 9, where Daniel is told to seal (חָתַם) and/or hide (סָתַם) what has been revealed to him.

Does this make the Book of Daniel the only Israelite textual corpus of secret revelation? Is the Book of Daniel a Jewish version of the Mesopotamian secret corpora? The injunctions in 8:26; 12:9; and especially 12:4 (חָתַם הַסֵּפֶר, “seal the book”) do characterize the material of the book as hidden; however, there is no evidence that anyone ever guarded the book from outsiders. In fact, given the general message of the book, keeping it secret would have worked against its purpose. From a critical perspective, therefore, these injunctions must be considered a literary-rhetorical ploy to gain authority for the book and to deal with the problem of transmission created by the book's choice of pseudonym. Concerning the latter: a putative Neo-Babylonian/early Persian-period mediator of divine secrets somehow had to pass his knowledge down to a late Hellenistic audience without that knowledge having ever become public in the intervening years. An injunction to seal and hide the words of his book is the final redactor's literary attempt to rectify this chronological problem. As for gaining authority, secrecy in the Book of

Texts,” in *Book of Daniel in the Light of New Findings* (ed. van der Woude), 515-19. Borrowing the literary-critical idea of focalization, he suggests that the phrase is intentionally ambiguous.

⁵⁹ Daniel as a literary character points outside the text to the group behind the pseudonym, probably the *maskilim*. On the idea that the “real heroes” of the book are the *maskilim*, see Collins, *Daniel with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*, 53. For a discussion of the identity of the *maskilim*, see Collins, *Daniel*, 56-70. For a sociological attempt to understand this group, see Davies, “Reading Daniel Sociologically,” 345-61. Despite some important clues, observations, and interpretations of the slight evidence, the *maskilim* remain elusive and will not concern us here further.

⁶⁰ The four kingdoms of Daniel 2 are closely paralleled by the four kingdoms of Daniel 7, the first chapter of the apocalyptic section of the book. In the final redaction of the book, therefore, chap. 2 foreshadows chap. 7 and takes on a new meaning in light of it (see, e.g., Collins, *Daniel*, 60, 152). Thus, the emphasis on exclusivity and secrecy of the revealed knowledge in 2:20-23 foreshadows the later apocalyptic orientation of the book.

Daniel seems to be a rhetorical means to display the revelatory abilities of the Jewish deity and the deity's mediator, and thereby create legitimation and gain authority for the revelatory corpus as a whole. Thus, even if Hellenistic Jewish readers considered themselves privileged readers of a secret revelatory corpus, there is no evidence from a critical perspective to consider the Book of Daniel historically as such.⁶¹

B. Daniel's First Court Conflict

Before concluding this discussion of secrecy in Daniel 2, I must take up the observation made earlier that this chapter presents the first conflict between Daniel and his Babylonian colleagues. Because this conflict swirls around a secret, it has important implications for understanding the use of secrecy in the chapter and thereby the book. A closer look at how Daniel opens his statement to King Nebuchadnezzar in v. 27 will serve as the starting point.

Daniel begins his statement in v. 27 by denying the ability of *the other court scholars* to make known the *secret* that the king demands to know. As was demonstrated earlier, the court scholars of Mesopotamia—exorcists, diviners, ritual lamenters, astrologers, and physicians—had several written, secret corpora of ritual and divinatory lore. These scholars were specialists in secrets. Notice, however, that Daniel's observation of the court scholars' failure in v. 27 is in marked contrast to their own excuse offered earlier in v. 10: they make a broad statement about *human inability* to make known the *matter* that the king demands. By including their own inability under the general umbrella of the more inclusive human inability, they attempt to diminish the bitterness of their failure and deflect responsibility for it. Moreover, by using the general term מַלְאָה ("matter") for what Daniel and they both recognize as certainly a matter requiring divine revelation and thus a "secret," they resist placing the king's demand conceptually within their own area of expertise. Daniel, however, having obtained the secret through his deity, has no qualms about stating the issue plainly: the court scholars have failed to discover the secret that they were asked to divine. They are doomed to failure from the beginning, it seems implied, because they do not have the relationship Daniel has with Yhwh, the revealer of secrets.⁶² It seems very likely, therefore, that, along with the use of secrecy as a method of characterizing the deity and Daniel, the issue of

⁶¹ See Collins, *Daniel*, 341-42, contra Davies, "Reading Daniel Sociologically," 357, who considers the question open.

⁶² Contrast this with Lawson ("God Who Reveals Secrets," 74; emphasis original), whose treatment misses the point here. He writes, "it is not that the Mesopotamian mantic arts are *ineffectual*, but that they are *idolatrous* and *pagan*." But the entire point of Daniel 2 is to contrast Daniel's effectiveness (due to Yhwh's assistance) with the other court scholars' impotent arts because of their lack of a connection to a god who truly reveals secrets. "Ineffectual" and "idolatrous" are thus inseparable.

secrecy also has a very specific polemical intention against the Mesopotamian court scholars as the possessors and guardians of the secret of the gods. The ancient, written scribal lore of the imperial establishment—the secret of the gods—and their custodians, the court scholars, prove ineffective in the face of the active, responsive, and direct revelation of the Hebrew deity to the chosen and trusted recipient.⁶³ This is a humiliating defeat.

One sympathetic to the Babylonian scholars could easily protest that the presentation in the Book of Daniel is not really fair or complain that the polemic cannot be substantiated, since dream interpreters are not normally included in Mesopotamian sources among the five scholarly crafts and we know nothing about a secret scholarly corpus for dream interpreters (even if we do know about an “Assyrian Dream Book”).⁶⁴ But the author is not presenting a disinterested account of the Mesopotamian court. A caricature of the whole of Mesopotamian scholarship here, as was true for Second Isaiah’s presentation of Mesopotamian divine images,⁶⁵ is all that is necessary to the story and certainly much more powerful rhetorically. Moreover, choosing dream interpretation as the point of contention allows the Jewish author acceptable, divinatory common ground on which the hero and the Babylonian court scholars can engage one another.⁶⁶ Thus, secrecy in Daniel 2 shows the bankruptcy of the Babylonian scholarly crafts, and this no less

⁶³ Contrast this again with Lawson (“God Who Reveals Secrets,” 75; emphasis original), who concludes his article by writing, “The only real distinction in Daniel [i.e., from Mesopotamian mantic wisdom] is the *identity* and *competence* of the deity doing the revealing, not any doctrine of revelation itself; for in the final analysis, the effective ingredient in Daniel’s dream interpretations was divinity, just as it was and always had been in the oneiromancy and other mantic arts of Mesopotamia.” The identity and competence of his deity are certainly two major distinguishing factors that mark Daniel out from the other Babylonian court scholars. Yet the method of revelation is also different. Daniel receives a *direct* communication from the deity. His ability to learn the secret that the king demands is due to his “charismatic endowment” of wisdom (as McKane [*Prophets and Wise Men*, 98] recognizes). The other scholars depend on textual corpora of ancient, secret revelatory lore (that is, *written documents*). Even if one insists that the Mesopotamian scholarly secret corpora are not directly in view in Daniel 2 but only an individual secret revelation—that is, a singular ad hoc divinatory result—I would still maintain that the corpora are indirectly condemned because they were the filter for interpreting all divinatory activities. A glance through the correspondence of Mesopotamian scholars to their kings confirms this fact (see Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*, throughout).

⁶⁴ A. Leo Oppenheim edited the Assyrian Dream Book in his *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East with a Translation of an Assyrian Dream Book* (Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 46.3; Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1956) 256-344.

⁶⁵ See Michael B. Dick, “Prophetic Parodies of Making the Cult Image,” in *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East* (ed. Michael B. Dick; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999) 1-53.

⁶⁶ On the necessity of finding acceptable common ground before a Jewish author could interact with foreign materials, see John J. Collins, “Stirring up the Great Sea: The Religio-Historical Background of Daniel 7,” in *Book of Daniel in the Light of New Findings* (ed. van der Woude), 121-36, here 123.

in their own king's court and within the very intellectual area in which they claimed exclusive knowledge.

Because Daniel receives a direct secret communication from the deity owing to his charismatic endowment and because the Babylonian scholarly background assumes written revelatory corpora as the means for the Babylonian scholars to discern a secret revelation, the above interpretation brings out a subtle undercurrent in this chapter of the familiar sociological phenomenon of "charisma versus institutionalization." Charisma (and effectiveness) is associated with the intuitive or oral and institutionalization (and ineffectiveness), with writing. This dichotomy suggests two tensions in the Book of Daniel—the first may have been intended, the second seems unresolved—that I mention only briefly. First, the charismatic mediator of divine knowledge, at least in the time frame of Daniel 2, is *servicing* the imperial institution at a time when it cannot serve itself. Even though Daniel's interpretation foresees the eventual fall of the four empires represented in the dream, he is working within the imperial system nonetheless—albeit with different rules. Second, this same charismatic, oral mediator of divine secrets is the very figure that the *Book* of Daniel uses to legitimate and authorize its own *textual* manifestation.

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, secrecy functions as a positive characterization of both the deity and Daniel. In the latter's case, this characterization shows him capable and worthy of future revelation, which contributes to the book's broader construction of a rhetoric of authority and textual legitimation. Secrecy also creates a point of conflict between Daniel and his Babylonian colleagues, the supposed experts in secret matters, and vividly shows the Jewish mediator as their superior. Even for Hellenistic-era readers under a different imperial oppression, the general message would have been clear: Yhwh's accessible secret revelations, now available in Daniel's book, are more powerful than the phony secretive grasping for knowledge of the human political establishment. The deployment of secrecy, therefore, cuts two ways: it exalts the protagonist and his deity and it debases the imperial antagonists. Such an interpretation could quite nicely fuel, if we may invert the imagery of Daniel 3, an anti-imperial, ancient, postcolonial critical furnace.

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