

Decoding a "Joint" Expression in Daniel 5:6, 16

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Oppenheim, in his classic study on dreams and their interpretation, states that "ominous phenomena . . . are considered warnings issued by the gods to those who observe and understand them."¹ These divine omina, which may be meant for a king, country, city, or any ordinary individual, may, if they presage ill tidings, be circumvented by specified apotropaic rituals. In one recorded instance, in a "typical *vaticinatio post eventum*," the divine will is revealed in a warning dream to King Assurbanipal by means of writing appearing on the pedestal of an image of Sin, the moon god.² Similarly, though not in a dream but rather in a waking state, King Belshazzar receives a supernatural forewarning in writing, when "the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace opposite the lampstand"³ (Dan. 5:5). Upon witnessing this ominous revelation and realizing that "once the moving finger having writ . . .," the king becomes panic-stricken and, in great alarm, summons his coterie of mantic professionals⁴ to read and "decipher" the written omen, promising them attractive perquisites for a successful decipherment (v. 7).

His trepidation and perturbation are described in the familiar imagery of a person's reaction upon receiving foreboding alarming news. This well-attested literary contention has been discussed briefly by Hillers.⁵ His lead text was drawn from the Baal epic,⁶ where it is reported that the goddess Anath, being full of dread at the forthcoming ill tidings brought by unexpected divine messengers, panicked: "Her feet wobble (*p^cnm · ttf*).⁷ Behind, her tendons do break (*b^cdn · ksl⁸ · tibr*); above,

ליחזן—היושב וחורז בדברי תורה ומתורה לנביאים ומנבאים לכתובים . . . והיו ערכים כעיקר נתינתם (שהש"ר א, י)

1. A. L. Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East* (Philadelphia, 1956), 239.

2. *Ibid.*, 201–2, 249–50.

3. For a discussion of the etymology of נִכְרָשְׁתָּא, "lampstand" (Persian or Akkadian), see A. R. Millard, "The Etymology of *Nebrastā*, Daniel 5:5," *Maarav* 4 (1987), 87–92.

4. See H.-P. Müller, "Mantische Weisheit und Apokalyptic," *SVT* 22 (1972), 268–93; and the remarks of M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford, 1989), 455, 512, on mantic wisdom and oneiromantic services in royal courts.

5. D. R. Hillers, "A Convention in Hebrew Literature: The Reaction to Bad News," *ZAW* 77 (1965), 86–89.

6. *CTA* 3, iii:29–32.

7. Ugar. *nff* = Heb. נוט (an example of the well-known interchange of medial waw and double ^cayin verbs). Cf. Ps. 99:1, where the verbs נוט and רגז appear in parallel cola.

8. For Ugar. *ksl* = Akk. *kislu* = Heb. כֶּסֶל, "sinew, tendon," see M. Held, "Studies in Comparative Semitic Lexicography," in *Studies Landsberger* = AS 16 (Chicago, 1965), 401–6.

her face sweats (^c*ln·pnh·td^c*). Bent are the joints [lit., "corners"] of her sinews (*tġš·pnt·kslh*); weakened those [i.e., tendons] of her back" (*anš·dt·zrh*). Though Hillers⁹ cited other similar examples from both Ugaritic¹⁰ and Biblical literature (but not from Daniel), as well as from the *Hodayot* from Qumran, evidence for such a literary *topos* of physiological reactions to fear and anxiety could also have been brought from Mesopotamian sources. Compare, for example, Esarhaddon's statement in his famous "Gottesbrief":¹¹ "(When) he [the king] heard my [Esarhaddon's] royal message which burns the enemies like a flame (*šū našparti šar-rūtiša ša kima nabli iqammū ajābi išmēma*), his hips collapsed (*qabalšū*¹² *imqussuma*), his heart was seized (by fear) (*libbašu šabitma*),¹³ his legs trembled (*itarrura išdāšu*) . . . his countenance looked bad" (*zimūšu ulamminma*).

Returning to Daniel, Belshazzar, overwhelmed by anxiety upon witnessing this esoteric writing, exhibits bodily symptoms characteristic of extreme fear and trembling (compare also vv. 9, 10), which are listed succinctly in descending corporeal order. First it is reported that זְיוֹהֵי שְׁנוּהִי,¹⁴ an expression which occurs three additional times in the book: 5:9, וְזְיוֹהֵי שְׁנֵי עֲלוֹהֵי; 5:10, וְזְיוֹהֵי אֶל-יִשְׁתַּנּוּ; 7:28, וְזְיוֹהֵי יִשְׁתַּנּוּ עָלָי.¹⁵ Aram. זִיּוּ is a loanword from Akk. *zīmu*, "appearance,

9. Hillers, "Convention."

10. For Ugaritic, Held, "Studies," 405, nn. 135–36, cites earlier studies of Cassuto and Ginsberg.

11. Borger, *Esarh.*, 102, II, i 1–4.

12. Ibid., following the suggested emendation of T. Bauer, *Akkadische Lesestücke* (Rome, 1953), 2:55, weighs the possibility of reading *haṭtu*. However, in light of the use of the verb *maqātu*, "to collapse," in connection with various other parts of the body (see CAD M/1, 245) the expression "collapsing of the hips" as one of the physiological reactions to fear is perfectly in order. For the employment of Heb. נפל (= Akk. *maqātu*) with a limb of the body (Heb. רֶגֶל, "thigh") in a different context, see Num. 5:21–22, 27.

13. CAD S, 7, translates: "His insides were affected." Cf. also the medical expression *šibit libbi*, "seizure of the belly (probably referring to an intestinal disorder)," ibid., 164. The use of the verb *šabātu*, "to seize," with *libbu* may be a clever veiled paronomasia, since a certain disease called *li'bu* (see CAD L, 181) often appears in conjunction with this verb—*li'bu šabātu*, "being seized by the *li'bu* disease."

14. Many commentators read שְׁנוּ עֲלוֹהֵי.

15. M. Gruber, *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in the Ancient Near East* = Studia Pohl 12/1–2 (Rome, 1980), 1:358–65, in his discussion of a "gloomy face" as characteristic of depression or sadness, makes reference (364–65, n. 1) to פָּנִים רָעִים in Eccl. 7:3 and פָּנִים רָעִים in Gen. 40:7; Neh. 2:2, "badness of face/the face is bad," which indicates sadness and dejection. Further corroboration for this meaning may be found in the very same verse (Neh. 2:2): "The king said to me, 'How is it that you look bad (פָּנֶיךָ רָעִים), i.e., depressed and dejected) though you are not ill? It must be bad thoughts (רָע לִב) . . .'" Thus, a "bad = sad mien" means that one is either sick or harbors ill thoughts. For one's inner disposition being reflected externally on one's facial expression, see also below. Nehemiah then explains the reason for his severe depression (v. 3): "How should I not look so dejected (פָּנִי רָעִים), since. . ."

It should be noted that the Akkadian interdialectal equivalent of Heb. הָרַע פָּנִים, *zīmu lemēnu/lummunu*, also refers to "making someone look or feel bad." Cf., e.g., *ana irēš šēri u šikari rēštī lummunu zimūšu*, "His looks are emaciated (i.e., he looks terribly bad) with craving for meat and fine beer"; O. R. Gurney, "The Sultantepe Tablets (continued): The Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur," *An.St.* 6 (1956), 150:8. For *panu lemnu* = Heb. פָּנִים רָעִים, cf. *mašhultuppū ša panūšu lemnu*, "the scapegoat whose face/appearance is bad/unlucky/evil"; G. Meier, "Die zweite Tafel der Serie *bit mēseri*," *AfO* 14 (1942), 146:19. For Heb. הָרַע לִב/רָע לֵב, "be sad," Deut. 15:10, 1 Sam. 1:8; Neh. 2:2, compare its Akkadian semantic equivalent, *libbu lemēnu*, which also carries the nuance of "becoming depressed"; e.g., *nīš libbišu eṭir libbišu iltenemmin*, "His libido is gone (and) he becomes depressed again and again"; F. Köcher, *BAM* 319:4.

looks, countenance, luster,"¹⁶ which appears together with several verbs signifying a "changed countenance." Especially to be noted is the use of the Akk. verb *ewû*, "to change," which is the exact semantic equivalent of Aram. שנה.¹⁷ Compare in the *šaf^cel*: *namrūtum zīmūka ukkuliš tušēma*, "You have changed your beaming appearance into a somber one."¹⁸ And [*ināšu pard*]â *zīmūšu šunnâ*, "His eyes are frightened, his countenance changed."¹⁹ The same Aramaic expression appears in Targum Onkelos to Deut. 34:7, where Heb. וְלֹא נָס לְחָהּ is interpreted as וְלֹא שָׁנָא זֵי יִקְרָא דְאַפּוּהָ.

The Hebrew interdialectal cognate equivalent, שנה פנים, appears in Job 14:20: "You overpower him forever and he perishes; you alter his visage (פָּנָיו מְשַׁנָּה)²⁰ and dispatch him" (NJPS). And, once again, in the riddle of Eccl. 8:1: "Who here is wise [dividing and revocalizing כָּהֶחֱכֵם as כֹּהֶ חֲכָם, with Ginsberg],²¹ and who knows the meaning of the adage: 'A man's wisdom²² lights up his face, but anger²³ changes his face'" (revocalizing the verb as a *pi^cel* as in the Vulgate, יִשְׁנָא, פָּנָיו, *contra* Masoretic *pu^cal*, יִשְׁנָה).²⁴ Compare, too, Ben Sira 12:18, who states that when misfortune befalls someone, a false friend makes all types of obscene

16. For Akk. *zīmu*, see CAD Z, 119–22; S. A. Kaufman, *The Akkadian Influences on Aramaic*, AS 19 (Chicago, 1974), 113. Since both *zīmu* and זֵי also mean "luster," there is no reason to assume, *contra* Gruber, *Aspects*, 2:577, n. 2, that in the description of the enormous statue seen by Nebuchadnezzar in his dream that זֵינָה (יִתִּיר) (Dan. 2:31) "corresponds to Akk. *melammu*, 'aura, glow, splendor.'" Aram. יִתִּיר means its "brightness/splendor was surpassing." Compare similarly *kīma ūmu immeru zīmūšu mādiš*, "(When Marduk heard this), brightly glowed his features like the day"; *En. el.* VI: 56a. Akk. *zīmūšu mādiš* corresponds semantically to Aram. יִתִּיר. For *zīmu* in connection with gods and stars, see CAD Z, 119–20. In Aramaic one's changed countenance "returns" to normal, תָּבַב זֵי (Dan. 4:33).

17. Gruber, *Aspects*, 1:358–62, discusses this expression, citing some cognate semantic equivalents: Akk. *zīmu nakāru*; Heb. שנה פנים; Ugar. *ʿtq bbt/ap*.

18. Lambert, *BWL*, 70:15 ("Theodicy").

19. O. R. Gurney, P. Hulin, and J. J. Finkelstein, *The Sultantepe Tablets* (London, 1957), 1:24:6'.

20. Most commentaries and translations emend the participle to the second person singular, תִּשְׁנָה.

21. H. L. Ginsberg, *Kohleth* (Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem, 1961), 104–5 [in Hebrew].

22. Though Ginsberg emends תִּתִּיר to תִּתִּיר, "joy," this does not affect the idiom under discussion. In this verse as well, one's inner disposition is reflected facially.

23. For Heb. עַז, "anger," Ginsberg refers to Ezra 8:22. He is followed in turn by Y. Muffs, "Two Comparative Lexical Studies," *JANES* 5 (T. H. Gaster Festschrift; 1973), 296–98, who relates it to Akk. *ezzu*, "anger, wrath."

24. "Changes his face" means, in this instance, "makes his face sad and gloomy," the exact antithesis of the first colon, תִּתִּיר פָּנָיו, "makes his face shine and cheery" (cf. Ugar. *nr pm*, "face shines" = Akk. *panu namāru* = Heb. תִּתִּיר פָּנָיו). Such figurative language is also very prevalent in Akkadian, where the substantives *bunnannû*, *būnu*, *panu*, and *zīmu*, referring to one's "external features, countenance, mood," appear with verbs that contrast being "bright, cheery, radiant, joyful, and happy" with being "gloomy, dark, sad, and sullen." See Gruber, *Aspects*, 1:358–65, 2:557–82. For the former, cf., e.g., *namāru*; CAD N/1:213–14. For the latter, cf., e.g., *nakāru*, which means "to change (primarily for the worse)" and with facial expressions, "to have an unhealthy appearance"; *ibid.*, 163. See also *nuk-kuru* with *lamassu* and *bunnannû*; *ibid.*, 169. However, more to the point are the following verbs: *ekēlu/ukkulu* (CAD E, 64); *erēpu* (*ibid.*, 279); *eṭū/uṭū* (*ibid.*, 412–13)—all basically meaning (with slightly different nuances), "to be dark." To these may be added, on the one hand, *nabāṣu/šunbuṣu*, "to shine brightly, become bright" (CAD N/1, 22–24); and, on the other, *adāru*, "to be worried, obscure, eclipsed, dark, sad" (CAD A/1, 103–7); *qatāru/qutturu*, "to become gloomy, dejected, dull, despondent" (CAD Q, 166–68); cf. also *ašāṣu*, "to become worried, disturbed" (CAD A/2, 422–24)—all with references to facial expressions.

gestures of contempt: "Then he will nod his head and shake his fist and hiss repeatedly, and show his true face" (lit., "change his face," *יִשְׁנֶה פָּנָיו*).²⁵ That one's inner disposition is reflected externally in one's facial appearance is also commented upon by that same sage in 13:25: "The heart of a person *changes his looks* either for good or for evil."²⁶ (He then goes on to explicate in v. 26: "The sign of a good heart is a radiant look" [lit., "a shining face"])²⁷ A woman's wickedness also makes itself noticeable by her countenance (25:17): "The wickedness of a woman blackens the appearance (*יִשְׁחִיר מַרְאֶה*) of (her) husband,"²⁸ and it [her wickedness] darkens her face (*יִקְדִּיר פָּנֶיהָ*) like a bear" (according to the Hebrew text).²⁹ The Greek translation, however, instead of "blackens the appearance," has ἀλλοιοῖ τὴν ὄρασιν αὐτῆς, "(Wickedness) changes her looks," reflecting Heb. *יִשְׁנֶה מַרְאֶה*.³⁰

In yet another frightening experience Daniel states (10:8): "So I was left alone to see this great vision. I was drained of my strength,"³¹ *וְהוּדִי נִהַפֵּךְ עָלַי לְמַשְׁחִית*—where *וְהוּדִי נִהַפֵּךְ עָלַי* is none other than another Hebrew cognate equivalent of the very same expression. Ginsberg, as part and parcel of his interpretation that the Hebrew sections of the book are a translation of an Aramaic original, suggests that Heb. *וְהוּדִי נִהַפֵּךְ עָלַי* was actually a mistranslation of an original Aram. *וְיָיִן יִשְׁתַּנּוּ*, for Aram. *זִי* (as well as Akk. *zīmu*, see above) means both "appearance" and "splendor." The translator, however, erroneously opted for the latter rather than the former.³² Note also the similar formulation in Jer. 30:6: *וְנִהַפְּכוּ כָּל-פָּנִים לִירְקוֹן*,³³ where the verb *הִפָּךְ*, "to change," is also employed in the *nif'al*, with the particle

25. Cf. too, in Rabbinic Hebrew, *עדיין לא בא בני בדיור שנשתנה מחליו*, "My son has not yet recovered his bright looks which changed due to his illness" (Midrash Rabbah to Song 2:2).

26. This verse is cited in Gen. Rab. 73:12 (end), in the name of Ben Sira.

27. The Hebrew text of v. 26b is problematic. For an interesting emendation, see Ginsberg, *Koheleth*, 105.

28. Most commentators, based on the Greek, a Hebrew ms., and the parallel colon, delete "(her) husband" and transfer the word to v. 18a. See P. W. Skehan and A. A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, AB 39 (Garden City, NY, 1987), 346.

29. For the variant figurative expressions found in the versions, see *ibid.*, 347.

30. The Syriac reads, "The wickedness of a woman turns her husband's face green." For the same expression in Hebrew, see Jer. 30:6: *וְנִהַפְּכוּ כָּל-פָּנִים לִירְקוֹן*, "All faces turned pale"—in consequence of fear. For the Akkadian interdialectal equivalent, *panu arāqu*, "the face pales," see CAD A/2, 232, s.v. *arāqu*, "to become green or yellow, to turn pale"; several of the examples are related to fear. These cognates were all overlooked in the most recent commentary to Jeremiah, W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, 1989), 150, 172. For the continued use of this idiom in Rabbinic Hebrew, cf. *פָּנִים מוֹרִיקוֹת*, e.g., M. *Sotah* 3:4; *Sifre* Num. 8 (end); T. *Sotah* 3:3; and in Aramaic, cf. *אֹרִיק*, e.g., Targ. Jon. to Num. 31:18; Targ. Ps. 113:9. For examples of the Hebrew verb *הִפָּךְ* with colors (but not facial ones), see Lev. 13:16, 17:55. Compare also Dan. 10:8. For other idioms of change of color in one's countenance due to fear, see Isa. 13:8; Joel 2:6; Nah. 2:11.

31. The unusual term *מִשְׁחִית* was, according to Ginsberg, borrowed from Isa. 52:14, where the verbal term refers to the disfigured appearance of the Servant of the Lord. For the Akkadian semantic equivalent of destroying (*לְמַשְׁחִית*) one's features, cf. *tu'abbiti bunnannēa*, "you have obliterated my features"; Ebeling, *KAR*, 226:5.

32. See H. L. Ginsberg, *Studies in Daniel* (New York, 1948), 41, who also credits F. Zimmermann, in the latter's articles which appeared in *JBL* 57 (1938), 258–72; 58 (1939), 349–54.

33. See above, n. 30.

ל referring to a change in countenance. This, in turn, should be compared to similar Akkadian expressions with the verb *šupêlu*, "to change";³⁴ e.g., *bunnannê šupêlu*: "You [the Lamaštu demon] make the appearance pale (*zīmī turraqī*), you bring about a change in face" (*bunnannê tušpellī*).³⁵ So, too, the verb *nakāru*, in the expression *panu/zīmu nakāru*, "to change (for the worse) one's appearance, to have an unhealthy appearance, to look bad";³⁶ e.g., *ina la mākalē zīmūa itta[kru]*, "Through lack of food my countenance looks bad";³⁷ *šumma ālittu panūša ikkiru*, "If a pregnant woman looks unhealthy."³⁸

Though there are obviously many reasons for one's "countenance to change," in all of the passages cited above from Daniel the direct cause is a frightening supernatural experience bringing on fear and trembling. The overwhelming "terrible" effect is further described in the continuation of the verse, Dan. 5:6. The king not only had a change of face, i.e., blanched, but, in addition, "his thoughts terrified him"³⁹ . . . and his knees knocked together."⁴⁰ This description is heightened by the Aramaic clause appearing between these two phrases: *וְקִטְרֵי חֲרָצָה מִשְׁתַּרְיָן*, "the joints of his loins"⁴¹ were loosened."⁴² (The reason for the selection of this specific wording will be explained below.) Such a physiological phenomenon is also attested and expressed in Akkadian texts by the interdialectal cognate equivalents of Aram. *וְקִטְרֵי חֲרָצָה מִשְׁתַּרְיָן*, Akk. *kaslū* (plural) and *riksū* (plural) *puṭṭuru*.⁴³ Aram. *וְקִטְרֵי חֲרָצָה מִשְׁתַּרְיָן* as well as Akk. *riksū* literally mean that which is "bound, knotted together." The former refers to "joints"; the latter, as well as *kaslū*, designates the "sinews, tendons"—cf. Ugar. *ksl*, above. Akk. *paṭāru/puṭṭuru*,⁴⁴ on the other hand, is the

34. This verb was not cited in Gruber, *Aspects*. See *AHw.*, 1279–80. For a discussion of the verb, see E. A. Speiser, "The 'Elativ' in West-Semitic and Akkadian," *JCS* 6 (1952), 81–92; reprinted in *Oriental and Biblical Studies*, eds. J. J. Finkelstein and M. Greenberg (Philadelphia, 1967), 465–93. The pertinent remarks are found on pp. 487–90.

35. See *CAD* B, 1, 318.

36. See *CAD* N/1, 163.

37. Lambert, *BWL*, 44:91 (*Ludlul*).

38. Labat, *TDP*, 206:77.

39. See also vv. 9–10.

40. For the "buckling" of the knees as a sign of extreme fright, cf. Nah. 2:11, where three of the same body parts, similar to those in Daniel, are also said to be severely affected: knees, loins, and face. For loins, see also Isa. 21:3; Ezek. 21:11; Ps. 69:24.

41. Cf. Ugar. *pnt ksl*, cited above. For *קטר* meaning "joint," see also TY *Ma'aserot* 4, 51b, "the joints of his fingers."

42. It would appear that the same Aramaic expression is present in Targ. Jon. to Gen. 50:11, *קטרי חרצהו אשתריין*. However, the noun there should not be read *קטריין*, "knots," i.e., "joints," but rather *קטורין*, "knots," i.e., "band, belt." (For *קטורא*, see also, e.g., Targ. Jon. to Deut. 18:4.) The "loosening of the waist bands" is a symbolic gesture of participation in mourning. Its Hebrew equivalent, which influenced the targum, *אֲזוּרֵי מְתִיבֵיהֶם הִתִּירוּ*, is cited on this verse in Gen. Rab. 100:6; see also *ibid.* 90:7. In many of the editions of the targum, the verb *שרי* has been graphically misprinted as *שרי*. For various manuscript readings and references, see D. Rieder, *Targum Jonathan ben Uzziel on the Torah* (Jerusalem, 1984), 1:100 [in Hebrew]. However, the identical expression does appear in Targum Sheni to Esth. 6:10 (not cited by Rieder), where the text is a conflate of various physiological symptoms, several of them directly adapted from Daniel: (was twisted, distorted) *אֲשֶׁתִּי וְעֵינָי אֲתַחֲשָׁכָה וְפִי אֶסְתַּלֵּךְ* (were confused, perplexed) *וְרִגְלֵי אֲשֶׁתִּי וְרִגְלֵי אֲשֶׁתִּי* (*וְרִגְלֵי אֲשֶׁתִּי וְרִגְלֵי אֲשֶׁתִּי*).

43. See Held, "Studies," 402–3.

44. For the multiple usages of *paṭāru/puṭṭuru*, see *AHw.* 849–51.

semantic cognate of Aram. שרי, "to loosen, untie."⁴⁵ For *kaslū*, compare: "If a . . . baby's sinews from its neck to its backbone are loosened (*kaslūšu puṭṭurū*), it will die."⁴⁶ The other phrase can be documented from the description of the anguished sufferer who, in his tormented outburst due to his manifold agonies, adds: "Through twisting, my sinews are loosened" (*puṭṭurū riksūa*).⁴⁷

Why this highly specific picturesque imagery? The clue to this "knot" can be unraveled further on in the text itself. The author reports that all the king's men and all the king's . . . magicians, exorcists, diviners, astrologers, and sundry other sages were unable to supply the king with either the correct reading or interpretation of the handwriting on the wall. In the midst of this perplexing and frustrating quandary, the queen comes to the rescue.⁴⁸ She reminds her husband that during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, his father, there was found "a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him" (v. 11). Since Daniel possessed such "extraordinary spirit, knowledge, and understanding to 'interpret' dreams (מִפְשָׁר תְּלִמִּין),⁴⁹ to explain riddles,⁵⁰ and מִשְׁרָא קְטָרִין" (vv. 11–12), he was appointed then to be in charge of all the other mantics who served in the royal court. Therefore, she advised Belshazzar to summon him for consultation. The king, after a bit of appropriate royal flattery, accompanied by promises of gifts galore and a substantial promotion, requests Daniel פִּשְׁרִין לְמִפְשָׁר and קְטָרִין לְמִשְׁרָא (v. 16). The first expression has been definitively clarified by Oppenheim in his study of its Akkadian etymological and semantic equivalent, *pašāru*, meaning "to release, remove, dispose of, relax, loosen, solve."⁵¹ Thus, it is very similar in meaning to the verb *paṭāru/puṭṭuru*. The second phrase, moreover, is none other than the identical one employed above to describe the king's panic. Here, however, in a very deft artistic play-on-expressions, it refers not to a physiological condition but rather to the mantic expertise of Daniel in "untying, unraveling, loosening knots." This, in turn, has been interpreted in two ways. It may refer to Daniel's skill and ability to loosen knots, i.e., break magical spells and charms. This is very common in magical texts and incantations, where the "knots" tied by the sorcerer (or his apprentice), to symbolically bind the intended victim, had to be untied by the appropriate

45. Contrast Dan. 3:24, מִכְּבָּתִּין, "bound," to 3:25, שְׁרִין, "untied, released." For Aram. שרי, "to release from a spell," see also TY *Moed Qatan* 3, 81d; TY *Sanhedrin* 7, 25d.

46. Held, "Studies," 403. See also CAD K, 425: "If a baby has *spina bifida* (lit., its transverse processes are open from its neck to its spine), it will die." The medical text is found in Labat, *TDP*, 222:41. Compare also *mešrêtu liptetṭira lirmû šerāni*, "Let the limbs loosen up, the sinews slacken"; BAM 248, ii:53, 66.

47. Lambert, *BWL*, 44:104 (*Ludlul*).

48. For the explanation of the initial absence of the queen (and Vashti, as well, in the book of Esther) at this time of the festivity, see E. Bickerman, *Four Strange Books of the Bible* (New York, 1967), 185–86.

49. Vocalize מִפְשָׁר and מִשְׁרָא as infinitives.

50. See H.-P. Müller, "Der Begriffe 'Ratsel' im Alten Testament," *VT* 20 (1970), 465–89, esp. 474–75.

51. Oppenheim, *Interpretation*, 217–20. "The interpreting is, therefore, a necessity, not performed primarily for the sake of establishing the content of the dream, but intended to rid (*pašāru*) the 'patient' of the impact of the enigma. . . . The modern expert analyses the dream which means, etymologically, he 'dis-solves' the dream; his Mesopotamian colleague 'solves' the dream" (p. 219). The verb is also used in connection with "dis-spelling" magic (*kišpu*); see CAD K, 456.

counter-magic. Compare one of the two interdialectal expressions referred to above, *kišrū pašāru/puṭṭuru*,⁵² which oft-times appears also in magical contexts;⁵³ e.g., *ana kišir lumni ša iksurūšu pašāri*, "to untie the evil knots which they have tied against him"; *kišrūša puṭṭuru*, "Her (magic) knots are untied"; *kišrī šunūti ša iṣḥurūni puṭṭir*, "Untie these (magic) knots which have encircled me." Similar examples of the use of the root קטר, both nominally and verbally, with this same meaning can be documented from Aramaic⁵⁴ and Syriac texts.⁵⁵ The other, much more bland interpretation relegates the "untying of knots" to the "solving of knotty difficulties,"⁵⁶ applying an extended figurative sense to the expression. Obviously that is what Daniel was requested to do, but in the light of his having been invited to the court on the basis of his reputation as the mantic *par excellence* in the kingdom, it seems that the original literal interpretation is at the root of the matter here. The king was taking no chances. He desired that the handwriting be "spelled" out so that his "charmed" existence might continue unharmed.

52. Reiner, *Šurpu* V–VI:183. For a study of the Akk. verb *kašāru* and noun *kišru*, see N. M. Waldman, "Akkadian *kašāru* and Semantic Equivalents," *JNES* 28 (1969), 250–54. For another reaction to fear—awestruck silence—see idem, "A Comparative Note on Exodus 15:14–16," *JQR* 66 (1975–76), 189–92.

53. For the textual citations, see CAD K, 437. Note that *pašāru* also appears in connection with "loosening of knots." See AHw. 842, G 9b, S 3, N 7c, esp. with *piiltu*; *ibid.*, 869.

54. See J. A. Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur* (Philadelphia, 1913), text 7:13 (קטר), and also possibly עיקרי, "knots" (text 34:10). For additional references, see C. D. Isbell, *Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls*, SBLDS 17 (Missoula, 1975), 91, text 36:5; 107, text 46:4; 114, text 50:1, 5 (קטר). The last citation, text 50:5, reads . . . דלא קטריה מישתרי, ". . . whose (magic) knots cannot be untied." Cf. also 1 Enoch 8:13, "the loosening of magical charms," in J. T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumran Cave 4* (Oxford, 1976), 157, and his comments (p. 160) on the Greek variants.

55. See R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus* (Oxford, 1890), col. 3591, who cites many examples of this usage in magical contexts. He also refers to Arab. *ʿqd*, for which cf. Aram. עקד, above, n. 54.

56. Müller, "Begriffe," 276–77, n. 4, thinks that it lost its original magical meaning, "Zauberkenntnis," and came to connote "Geheimnisse enträtseln, schwierige Aufgabe lösen." He also adduces Egyptian, *uḥʿ tss.t*, "das Verknötete lösen," with the meaning, "Schwierigkeiten beseitigen." See A. Erman and H. Grapow, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*, 2nd ed. (Berlin and Leipzig, 1957), 1:348. Cf. also S. R. Driver, *Daniel* (Cambridge, 1912), 66; L. F. Hartman and A. A. Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel*, AB 23 (Garden City, N.Y., 1978), 184; and A. Lacocque, *The Book of Daniel* (Atlanta, 1979), 96, all of whom weigh both possibilities but opt for the second. For the latter suggestion, some of the above exegetes refer to the substantive קטר with the supposed meaning, "difficulty," in TB *Yebamoth* 61a, 107b. However, in both these instances the noun means "conspiracies." Those who favor this less "charm-ing" interpretation usually follow Marti (cited by Montgomery, *Daniel*, 259), "an Zauberei denkt der Verfasser kaum."

Subsequent to submitting this article for publication, there appeared a critical note by A. Walters, "Untying the King's Knots: Physiology and Wordplay in Daniel 5," *JBL* 110 (1991), 117–22, which pertains to the same passage dealt with in the present study. Though his approach to the subject is entirely different from mine, it should be noted that he, too, caught the *double entendre* in the text.