

Daniel 2:20-23 A Bilingual Edition

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The original Aramaic is presented in Tiberian Masoretic dress. Vertical alignment of versets facilitates the observation of parallelisms. A verset of two to three stress units is given a line of its own, with stress units marked by the use of the *maqeph* like MT, but not always in accordance with it. Interstitial gaps of varying dimensions set off lines, strophes, and stanzas. A circulus is placed over a word if its consonantal skeleton or vocalization is at variance with MT. An introduction to the way ancient Hebrew and Aramaic verse works is offered elsewhere.¹

The English translation is designed to enhance appreciation of the poetry of the original. The goal has been to furnish a global approximation of the poetry and prosody of the Aramaic, even if the results are necessarily piecemeal. I sometimes retain examples of grammatical incongruence, ellipsis, and inversion which perforce result in a less idiomatic rendering.

Minimal use of capitalization and punctuation is intentional. By and large capitalization marks the onset of a stanza as defined in the general rule.²

שָׁרָא is mistranslated in NJPSV, NRSV, REB, NAB, NJB, and NIV by ‘dwell.’ The verb means to ‘loosen (loads)’ (as BDB puts it) in the process of putting down for the night after a journey; by extension, in the passive, to ‘break’ for the night after a journey. The semantic range is not unlike Greek καταλύω. The image is of the sun breaking at the end of a day’s journey (cf. Jdg 19:9 ‘the encamping of the day’). Every night the sun reenters its ‘tent in the heavens’ (Ps 19:5) and breaks there with its Maker. Job 38:19 has a related sense: the path to where the light ‘sets down’ between its travels (cf. שָׁכַן in Num 9:17; 24:2) cannot be located by humans. Qoh 1:5, on the other hand, imagines the sun to pause not at all (‘the sun comes out / the sun reenters // and to its place [the East] it pants / there to come out again’).

¹ See the writer’s “Regularities in Ancient Hebrew Verse: An Overview,” and supporting essays, at www.ancienthebrewpoetry.typepad.com.

² The general rule: ancient Hebrew and Aramaic verse is confined within a system of “twos and threes”: two to three “stress units” make up a “verset”; two to three versets a poetic “line”; two to three lines a “strophe”; two to three strophes a “stanza”; two to three stanzas a “section”; and two to three sections a poem, or an extensive section thereof.

Daniel 2:21-23

דניאל ב 20-23

May the name
of the great God be blessed
from age to age
for wisdom and might
it is his

and it's he who changes
the times and seasons
who removes kings
and sets up kings
who gives wisdom to the wise
and knowledge to the knowing

It's he who uncovers
what's deep and hidden
the knower of what lies in darkness
the light finds respite with him
to you, God of my fathers,
I give thanks and praise
for wisdom and enlightenment
you gave to me
and now you gave me to know
what we asked of you
for the matter of the king you gave us
to know

לְהוֹא שְׁמֵהּ
דִּי־אַלְהָא רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ
מִן־עֲלָמָא וְעַד־עֲלָמָא
דִּי־חֲכֻמָּתָא וְגַבְוִרְתָּא
דִּי־לָהּ הִיא

וְהוּא מְהַשְׁנֵא
עֲדָנִיא וְזַמְנִיא
מְהַעֲדָה מְלָכִין
וּמְהַקִּים מְלָכִין
יְהִיב חֲכֻמָּתָא לְחַכְיָמִין
וּמְנִדְעָא לִידְעֵי בִינָה

הוּא גְלָא
עֻמְקֻתָא וּמְסֻתְרָתָא
יָדַע מַה בַּחֲשׂוֹכָא
וְנִהוּרָא עִמָּה שְׂרָא

לְךָ | אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי
מְהוֹדָא וּמְשַׁבַּח אַנְהּ
דִּי־חֲכֻמָּתָא וְנִהוּרָתָא
יְהִיבֵתְ לִי

וּכְעַן הוֹדַעְתָּנִי
דִּי־בִעֵינָא מִנְךָ
דִּי־מִלַּת מְלָכָא הוֹדַעְתָּנָא