Babylonian Religious Functionaries
Mentioned in Daniel

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Introduction

The present paper could be considered an appendix to the one on Dan 4 in this issue of *Historicism*.[1] Its purpose here is to document in greater detail the various types of religious functionaries mentioned in Daniel. They are listed below by frequency of use, showing all the forms in which they appear. See table 1.

Table 1
Hebrew And Aramaic Terms for Professional
Categories Mentioned in Daniel

Term	Reference	Language	Number and State
Enchanters			
ᵃšāpîm	1:20; 2:2	Hebrew	Plural
ᵓāšap	2:10	Aramaic	Singular absolute
ᵓāšᵉpîm	2:27; 5:11	Aramaic	Plural absolute
ᵓāšᵉpayyāᵓ	4:7(4); 5:7, 15	Aramaic	Plural emphatic
Magicians			
ḥarṭummîm	1:20; 2:2	Hebrew	Plural
ḥarṭôm	2:10	Aramaic	Singular absolute
ḥarṭummîn	2:27; 5:11	Aramaic	Plural absolute
ḥarṭummayyāᵓ	4:7(4)	Aramaic	Plural emphatic
Astrologers			
kaśdîm	2:2	Hebrew	Singular
kaśdāy	2:10	Aramaic	Singular absolute
kaśdāᵓîn	5:11	Aramaic	Plural absolute
kaśdayyāᵓ	4:7(4); 5:7	Aramaic	Plural emphatic
Diviners			
gāzrîn	2:27; 5:11	Aramaic	Plural absolute
gāzrayyāᵓ	4:7(4); 5:7	Aramaic	Plural emphatic
Wise Men			
ḥakkîmîn	2:27	Aramaic	Plural absolute
ḥakkîmayyāᵓ	5:15	Aramaic	Plural emphatic
Sorcerers			
mᵉkaššᵉpîm	2:2	Hebrew	Plural

Whereas the book of Daniel was originally written in Hebrew (chaps. 1, 8-12) and Aramaic (chaps. 2-7), a majority of the above terms are borrowed from other languages. Three

come from Akkadian (ʾaššāp/ʾāšap "enchanter," kaśday "astrologer," and makšāp "sorcerers") and one from Egyptian (ḥarṭôm "magician"). Only two (gāzar "diviner," ḥakkîm "wise man"), are Western Semitic in origin. See table 2.

Table 2
Origins of Hebrew and Aramaic Terms

English	Aramaic/Hebrew	Cognate	Gloss	Origin
Enchanters	ʾāšᵉpîn	ašipu	"Exorcist"	Akkadian
Magicians	ḥartummîn	ḥr-tb	"Lector priest"	Egyptian
Astrologers	kaśdāʾîn	kaldu	"Chaldean"	Akkadian
Diviners	gāzrîn	*gzr	"Cut, determine"	Aramaic
Wise Men	ḥakkîmîn	*ḥkm	"Be wise"	Aramaic
Sorcerers	mᵉkaššᵉpîm	kašāpu	"Practice sorcery"	Akkadian

The Words in the Lists

We now discuss each of the above words in turn. Of special interest are those cases where either the meaning of a word or the function it describes has undergone change over time.

Enchanters

Another name for the "enchanters" in NIV is "exorcists." According Stephen A. Kaufman the Aramaic word ʾāšap is not merely cognate with Akkadian āšipu but was borrowed from it.

> āšipu, "exorcist" - BA and BH šp (noun); Syr[iac] špʾ and šwpʾ and verb šp (pᶜal); Mand[aic] verb šp only. Note that this word does not occur in J[ewish] Ar[amaic]. As the Akkadian comes from a root with initial waw, there can be no question of a cognate here. It is noteworthy that none of the Aramaic forms reflect the active participle form of the Akkadian but rather other "professional" noun forms. The unusual BA vocalization ʾāšap could conceivably be a reflex of the original Akkadian form, but there are unfortunately no other loanwords of similar phonetic shape with which to compare it.[2]

An exorcist was primarily a healer, but one who approached his task from the perspective of casting out demons rather than treating physical symptoms.

> In commenting on the healing of the Aramaean general Naaman, J. A. Montgomery, for instance, traced back to āšipu the peculiar verb ʾāsap used in 2 Kings 5:11; later on, Max Ellenbogen pointed out the āšipu-like character of the treatment which, according to v 11, Naaman had expected from the healer.[3]

My point here is that the āšipu was not merely a diagnostician. He was expected to come out, call on his god, wave his hands, and effect a cure.

Magicians

Franz Rosenthal states that the term *ḥarṭôm* ("magician") might be Egyptian in origin but does not come out clearly and say so: "The fact of Hebrew origin is occasionally proven or made likely by phonetic reasons, as in *šāpṭîn* "judges" (par. 18) or *ᶜelyônîn* "most high" (par. 22)."[4] Such hesitancy is no longer necessary. The word *ḥarṭôm* is truly Egyptian in origin, despite the fact that it appears in a number of Old Testament passages.[5] According to Paul E. Dion,

> *ḥarṭôm* is a Hebrew/Aramaic adaptation of Demotic *ḥr-tb* (earlier *ḥry-tp*), literally "head-one". This title used to be given to high-ranking lector-priests (*ḥry-ḥb.t*) during the second millenium, but it later became the usual designation of their profession. See the useful syntheses of earlier research by B. van de Walle, " *ḥry-ḥb.t ḥry-tp* et *ḥarṭôm*", *Chronique d'Egypte* 18(1943)263; A. H. Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica: Text* (London: Oxford University Press, 1947)1.55*-56*.[6]

Egyptian *ḥr-tb* has *āšipu* as its Babylonian counterpart.[7] The same term *ḥr-tb* comes into Hebrew and Aramaic as *ḥarṭôm*. Thus, the two Hebrew words *ᵓaššāp* and *ḥarṭôm* offer two ways of describing largely similar functions.

Astrologers/Chaldeans

The word that NIV translates "astrologers" (lit. "Chaldeans") has a long and interest history.[8] The Chaldeans are first mentioned during the reign of Shalmaneser III (858-824 B.C.) as a group of tribes living "among the swamps and lakes along the lower courses of the Tigris and Euphrates."[9]

> With the accession of Nabonassar (Nabu-nasir) in 747 we enter a new era in the history of Babylon. Henceforth precise records of historical events were systematically kept, and both the Babylonian Chronicle and the 'Ptolemaic Canon' begin their accounts with the accession of this king.[10]

Members of these southern Chaldean tribes are preeminently the ones who kept the above records. "In Hellenistic astronomy the Nabonassar Era was indeed recognized as a turning point in the history of science and the very term Chaldaean came to signify 'astronomer'."[11] It would later come to signify any type of charlatan. So here we have an ideal opportunity to test competing hypotheses on the time in Babylonian history when the book of Daniel was written. In Daniel the word *kaśdāy* has already lost its ethnic connotations but astrology has not yet lost its good name. The Chaldeans are portrayed as respected professionals.

So over what time period did the above changes in meaning occur? Chaldeans began establishing a reputation as record keepers and astronomers during the reign of Nabu-nasir (746-734 B.C.), as pointed out above. The name started losing both its specific association with the stars and also its public respect shortly before the Hellenistic era began. A historical anecdote will illustrate this latter point.

Frontinus and Polyaenus tell us of the way in which the 'inspectors' of later days had recourse to base tricks to deceive the masses. They tell, for instance, of a certain augur, who, desirous of obtaining an omen that would encourage the army in a battle near at hand, wrote the words, 'victory of the king,' backwards on the palm of his hand, and then, having pressed the smooth surface of the sacrificial liver against his palm, held aloft to the astonished gaze of the multitude the organ bearing the miraculous omen. The augur's name is given as *Soudinos* 'the Chaldean,' but this epithet had become at this time, for reasons to be set forth in the next lecture, generic for soothsayers and tricksters, indiscriminately, without any implied reference to nationality. Hence *Soudinos*, who may very well have been a Greek, is called 'the Chaldean.'[12]

Notice when these events occurred: "Frontinus tells the story in connection both with a campaign of Alexander the Great and with a war waged by Eumenos, the son of Attalos I., of Pergamos. Polyaenus places the incident in the days of Philip of Macedon."[13] During the eight century B.C. "Chaldean" meant a person from southern Babylonia. During the sixth century it referred to the profession of the Chaldeans rather than their ethnic origins but had not yet been generalized to other forms of augury besides stars,[14] nor had it forfeited any public esteem. By the fourth century the same term referred to charlatans of all kinds. Thus, Daniel's use of *kaśdāy* is exactly what we would expect to find in the work of a sixth century author.

Diviners

The "diviners" of Dan 2:27; 4:7(4); 5:7, 11 are, as the NIV translators suggest, diviners - i.e., *bārû* priests.[15] These men represent a very prominent category within Babylonian religion. They were the ones who examined sheep's livers and other forms of natural phenomena to determine whether the gods were favorably or unfavorably disposed toward a given enterprise at the moment.[16] All of this would be noncontroversial except for the fact that Daniel does not use the Babylonian term *bārû*. Instead he uses the Aramaic word *gāzar*.

Some scholars have misinterpreted this fact. Dion cites research indicating that the "diviners" mentioned in Daniel were not diviners but "enchanters"[17] and then criticizes Daniel for not knowing about *bārû* priests - an accusation which, if valid, would certainly weaken the historical claims of the book. I submit that the extra *gāzrîn* are the missing *bārû* priests.

To establish his case Dion must prove that the idea conveyed by the root *gzr* has something to do enchanting. But it does not. What it does have to do with is separating or discerning. The difference between discerning and enchanting corresponds roughly to that between reading and writing, watching and speaking. The *bārû* priest did not attempt to alter the course of events in any way but, by examining sheep's livers and other facts of nature, he reported whatever omens he might find. He did not attempt to exert any influence on the objects of his study or on the gods. Any diviner who attempted to do that would lose the respect of his peers and possibly his head if he was divining for the king, which most were. Enchanters, on the other hand, took active steps to ward off evil - primarily by exorcising demons. The functions performed by these two categories of Babylonian professionals are entirely separate and distinct.

The root used is Hebrew/Aramaic *gzr*. Does this root have to do with discerning only or with actively influencing a state of affairs? Words built on this root have either a tangible or a metaphorical meaning. On the one hand they have to do with separating, cutting, or dividing and

on the other with determining or making known what is determined. In terms of word origins the idea of physical separation comes first. Separating mental objects is a straightforward metaphorical extension of separating physical objects (cf. the similar relationship between our own words "incision" and "decision").

In the Aramaic of Daniel, we have already considered *gāzrîn* in Dan 2:27; 5:11 and *gāzrayyāʾ* in Dan 4:4; 5:7. There are two verbal uses in Dan 2:34 ("'While you were watching, a rock was cut out [*hitgᵉzéret*] but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them'") and 2:45 ("'This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out [*ʾitgᵉzéret*] of a mountain, but not by human hands - a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces'"). Here the word means "cut [out]." And there are two additional nominal uses in 4:17(14) ("'"The decision is announced [*bigᵉzērat*] by messengers; the holy ones declare the verdict, . . ."'") and 4:24(21) ("'This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree [*bigᵉzērat*] the Most High has issued against my lord the king:'"). Here the word means "decision" or "decree." On the one hand we have *bigᵉzērat ʿîrîn* (lit. "by decision of [the] watchers") and on the other hand *bigᵉzērat ʿillā[y]ʾā* (lit. "by decision of the Most High").

The above confluence of tangible and metaphorical meanings is not limited to the root **gzr*. There are a number of roots in Hebrew (**bʾr*, **byn*, **bqr*, **gzr*, **ḥqq*, **ḥrṣ*, **mnh*, **nqb* I, **qṣṣ*), Mishnaic Hebrew (**ḥtk*), and Syriac (**bwn* [=Hebrew **byn*], **gzr* [=Hebrew **gzr*], **grm*, **spr* [=Hebrew **spr*], **psq*, **prš*) where these same ideas converge and are both expressed in one way or another by a single root. Examples of roots which illustrate paired meanings of this sort are documented separately. See appendix.

The fact is that none of what we find in **gzr* or any of the roots which resemble it most closely in meaning has anything to do with incantations. The purpose for performing incantations is to shape fate, not to determine what omens the gods have left behind as clues to their constantly fluctuating will and intent. Determining, or inspecting, or finding out - these are the tasks of a *bārû* priest, not of an *āšipu*. From these facts I conclude that Daniel's lists do not have two types of enchanter on the one hand and no *bārû* priests on the other. They include both.

Wise men

"Wise men" is simply a generic term meant to include all the others. Aramaic *ḥakkîmîn* ("wise men") occurs in Dan 2:12, 13, 14, 18, 21, 24, 24, 27, 48; 4:6(3), 18(15); 5:7, 8, 15. Hebrew *ḥākām* ("wise man," "wiseman") occurs twice in Esther (1:13; 6:13), eleven times in Jeremiah (4:22; 8:8, 9; 9:12[11], 17[16], 23[22]; 10:7, 9; 18:18; 50:35; 51:57), three times in Ezekiel (27:8, 9; 28:3), and frequently elsewhere in the Old Testament - 137 times in all.

Sorcerers

Hebrew verbs built on the root **kšp* occur in Exod 7:11; 22:18(17); Deut 18:10; 2 Chr 33:6; Mal 3:5. For the Hebrew noun *kaššāp* ("sorcerer") see Jer 27:9. For Hebrew *kêšep* ("sorcery") see 2 Kgs 9:22; Isa 47:9, 12; Mic 5:12(11); Nah 3:4, 4.

The *asû* Practitioner

Let me say just a word about the *asû* practitioner, frequently mentioned together with the *āšipu* of our lists,[18] but itself omitted there.

> The antiquity of the medical profession in Babylonia, as well as its antecedents, is indicated by the term denoting 'physicians'. This word, *asu* in Akkadian, derives from the Sumerian *a-zu* or *ià-zu*, which terms mean 'the man who knows water (or oil)', the implication being that the *asu* was originally a man who divined by water or lecanomancy, presumably with the aid of the water-god Ea. Medicine was under the particular protection of the goddess Gula. There was also a god actually called Ninazu 'Lord Doctor', whose son Ningizzida had as his symbol the rod with intertwined serpents, still accepted as a symbol of the healing profession.[19]

Conclusion

Correctly understood the linguistic evidence from Daniel's word lists support an early date of authorship for the book that bears his name. There is nothing in the lists that would contradict such a claim.

NOTE: All Scripture quotations in this paper, except when noted otherwise, are from the Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright (c) 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society.

[1]See Hardy, "Some Thoughts on Dan 4," pp. 47-62 above.

[2]Kaufman, *The Akkadian Influences on Aramaic*, Assyriological Studies, No. 19 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. 38-39. "Each Babylonian had his own personal god or goddess, to whom he offered prayers and sacrifices, and whose duty it was to intercede for him with the other gods and to protect him against the mass of devils and evil spirits with which the universe was believed to be inhabited and against whom even the gods were not immune. Prophylactic amulets were worn, and there existed a variety of 'priests' (*ashipu*, *mashmashu*) whose duty it was to recite incantations and to perform rituals designed to ward off such evil powers" (Joan Oates, *Babylon*, Ancient Peoples and Places, vol. 94, gen. ed. Glyn Daniel [London: Thames and Hudson, 1979], p. 176).

[3]Dion, "Medical Personnel in the Ancient Near East: *asû* and *āšipu* in Aramaic Garb," *Aram* 1 (1989): p. 215.

[4]See Rosenthal, *A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1974), p. 57.

[5]See Gen 41:8; 24:1; Exod 7:11, 22; 8:7(3), 18(14), 19(15); 9:11, 11.

[6]Dion, "Medical Personnel," n. 33, p. 211. "In the book of Daniel, *ʾšpʾ*, an Aramaic reflex of *āšipu*, is listed six times with other titles of diviners and magicians ostensibly subservient to the king of Babylon (2:10, 27; 4:4; 5:7, 11, 15). Four times (2:10, 27; 4:4; 5:11), the Egyptian loan word *ḥartōm*, a late designation of the "lector-priest", forms part of the list. At two places the whole group is described as 'all the experts (*ḥakkîmê*) of Babylon' (4:3-4; 5:7)" (ibid.).

[7]Dion finds it puzzling that both words should appear in the same list: "However, in the Daniel stories, which purport to depict conditions at the Babylonian court in the VIth century, the

repeated collaboration of *ḫr-tb* and *āšipu* is more puzzling [than the co-occurrence of *ḫr-tb* and *mašmaššu*]; one can seriously entertain the possibility that *ḥartōm* was simply borrowed by the author from Pentateuchal stories about Joseph (Gen. 41:8, 24) and especially Moses (Exod 7:11, 22; 8:3, 14, 15; 9:11), where this type of Egyptian magician is said to perform stunning miracles" (ibid.). But why must *ḫr-tb* priests be unknown in Babylon? The same author states that Esarhaddon (680-669 B.C.) captured Egyptian *ḫr-tb* priests and valued their services. "The most impressive illustration of this popularity is the abstract formation *ḥrtmw* ('spell'), found in an Aramaic fragment of 1 Enoch 8:3, a reflex of *ḫr-tb* easily as old as those in the book of Daniel" (ibid.). If Egyptian *ḫr-tb* priests were present in Ninevah before Daniel's time and if the word was as common in the Aramaic of that period as Dion suggests, why should it be impossible to find *ḫr-tb* priests in Babylon during Daniel's lifetime?

[8]See Gen 11:28, 31; 15:7; 2 Kgs 24:2; 25:4, 5, 10, 13, 24, 25, 26; 2 Chr 36:17; Neh 9:7; Job 1:17; Isa 13:19; 23:13(?); 43:14; 47:1, 5; 48:14, 20; Jer 21:4, 9; 22:25; 24:5; 25:12; 32:4, 5, 24, 25, 28, 29, 43; 33:5; 35:11; 37:5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14; 38:2, 18, 19, 23; 39:5, 8; 40:9, 10; 41:3, 18; 43:3; 50:1, 8, 10, 25, 35, 45; 51:4, 24, 35, 54; 52:7, 8, 14, 17; Ezek 1:3; 11:24; 12:13; 16:29; 23:14, 15, 16, 23; Hab 1:6. Aramaic: See Ezra 5:12.

[9]Oates, *Babylon*, pp. 112.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Ibid., p. 113.

[12]Morris Jastrow, *Aspects of Religious Belief and Practice in Babylonia and Assyria*, American Lectures on the History of Religions (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1911), p. 199.

[13]Ibid., n. 3.

[14]Not everyone accepts such evidence: "The late and artificial character of the biblical lists in Daniel is evident above all from the repeated inclusion of *Kaśdāyēʾ* ('Chaldaeans') with the certainly anachronistic meaning of 'astrologers'" (Dion, "Medical Personnel," p. 213). The "anachronism" here is that the term is used in a manner appropriate to the sixth century.

[15]"The name given to the class of priests whose special function it was to divine the future was *bârû*, which means literally 'inspector.' . . . The high antiquity to which divination through the liver can be traced back in the Euphrates Valley justifies the conclusion that the application of the term *bârû* to the 'inspector' of the signs on the liver represents the oldest usage, and that the term was subsequently employed to designate other forms of divination, all of which, however, involved the scrutiny and interpretation of signs. So he who gazed at the heavens and read the signs to be noted there was also called a *bârû* and, similarly, the name was given to the priest who divined the future through noting the action of drops of oil poured in a basin of water, or through observing clouds or the flight of birds or the actions of animals, or who could interpret any other phenomenon which because of its unusual or striking character aroused attention. The term *bârû* in this way became the general term for 'diviner,' whose function it was to interpret omens of all kinds" (Jastrow, *Belief and Practice*, pp. 162, 164).

[16]"In the official reports of liver examinations forwarded to the rulers, and at times embodied in their annals, all the signs, as observed, were recorded, and the interpretations added as quotations from these omen collections. It thus happened that, in many cases, these interpretations had no direct bearing on the character of the inquiry, but the interpretation showed whether or not the sign was favourable, which was the chief concern of both priests and applicants" (ibid., p. 185).

[17]See G. Furlani, "Aram. *gāzrîn* - scongiuratori" [Aramaic *gāzrîn* - Conjurers], Annali dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Classe di Scienze Morali, Storiche e Filologiche, *Rendiconti*, VIII, iv (1948): 177-96.

[18]Speaking of the Genesis Apocryphon Dion states, "All the details of Abram's intervention, including the laying on of the hand, have good parallels in the Babylonian *āšipu*

literature; but most noteworthy is the *asû* - *āšipu* cooperation, that we found so well documented in cuneiform writings from ancient Mesopotamia and surrounding cultures" ("Medical Personnel," p. 214).

[19]H. F. W. Saggs, *The Greatness That Was Babylon* (New York: Mentor, 1962), pp. 433.