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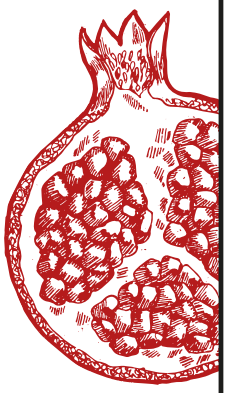

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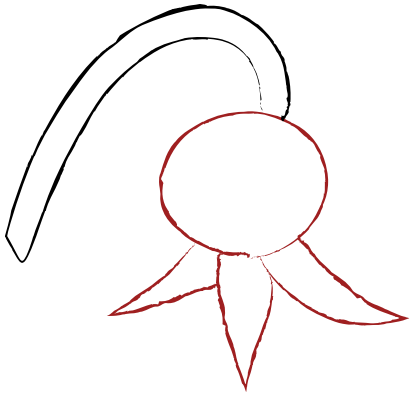
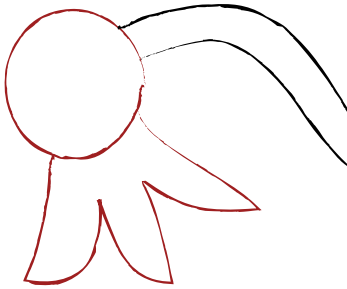


Categories and Boundaries in Second Temple Jewish Literature



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HOW TO CATEGORIZE THE KING: DANIEL 4 IN LIGHT OF MESOPOTAMIAN DIVINE–HUMAN–ANIMAL BOUNDARIES

Peter Joshua Atkins

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Abstract

The narrative in Dan 4 invariably seems to raise questions about the relationship and distinction between humans, animals, and divine beings. This can be seen firstly in how the human king Nebuchadnezzar appears to offend the Most High God, and then latterly in how he receives an animalizing affliction. While the basic categories of divine, human, and animal therefore seem to be important, the boundaries between them may also be troubled by the narrative's events. The Danielic narrative does not itself exactly determine what constitutes these boundaries. Indeed, they appear to be left quite ill-defined. However, as scholarship on Dan 4 has recently benefitted from utilizing comparative Mesopotamian material to explain aspects of the chapter, this article will look at how divine–human–animal boundaries are constructed in such ancient Near Eastern texts. Drawing on previous studies, the key indicators of these boundaries within Mesopotamian material will be isolated, before then attempting to read Dan 4 in light of them. This article will therefore argue that the portrayal of Nebuchadnezzar in Dan 4 utilizes similar divine–human–animal boundaries to those found in Mesopotamian texts, and that the king's position relies upon his relationship with both wisdom and immortality. Furthermore, this study of Dan 4 also aims to use this particular biblical narrative to form a framework within which future scholarship can consider similar boundaries to be at work in other Second Temple texts.

Le récit trouvé en Daniel 4 soulève invariablement des questions quant à la relation et à la distinction entre humains, animaux et êtres divins. On le voit déjà dans la façon dont le roi humain Nabuchodonosor offense le Dieu Très-Haut, ensuite dans la façon dont il est affligé par un syndrome animalisant. Alors même que les catégories du divin, de l'humain et de l'animal semblent importantes, les limites qui les séparent peuvent être compliquées par les événements du récit. Le récit trouvé dans Daniel ne détermine pas exactement ce qui constitue ces frontières. Elles semblent même être assez mal définies. Il faut noter cependant que la recherche sur Dn 4 a récemment profité de l'utilisation de matériel mésopotamien comparatif pour expliquer certains aspects du chapitre. Cette contribution examine la façon dont les frontières divin–humain–animal sont construites dans les textes du Proche-Orient ancien. En s'appuyant sur des études antérieures, l'analyse isole les indicateurs clés de ces frontières au sein du matériel mésopotamien, puis lit Dan 4 grâce à ces indicateurs clés. Cette contribution montre que la représentation de Nabuchodonosor dans Dn 4 utilise des frontières divin-humain-animal similaires à celles trouvées dans les textes mésopotamiens, et que la position du roi repose sur sa relation avec la sagesse et l'immortalité. Enfin, cette étude de Dan 4 vise également à utiliser ce récit biblique particulier comme un fondement sur lequel de futures études pourront s'appuyer pour examiner des frontières semblables dans d'autres textes du Second Temple.

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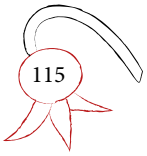


For centuries, humans have been preoccupied with understanding their position in the world and a seeming fascination with creatures other than themselves. One of the ways in which humans have attempted to address these interests is through the creation of conceptual boundaries and structures to understand themselves as distinct from other creatures. These boundaries could be understood as "the patterned arrangement of roles, positions or statuses, consciously recognized and regularly operative in a given society" (Basson 2009, 8). Some key conceptual boundaries are perhaps those between humans, animals, and the divine, which have served to help humans to define who they are, and these can be found in early Jewish texts (Newsom 2021, 120).[1]

[1] There are, of course, other potential boundaries such as animate–inanimate or animal–plant boundaries. An examination of these may be fruitful, especially in

Within Second Temple literature, the preeminent narrative that raises questions about such interests is perhaps Dan 4.

King Nebuchadnezzar here engages with various beings throughout the text. Firstly, the king has a dream about a great tree that shelters the animals of the field (Dan 4:7–9).[2] Then "a holy watcher" appears in his dream ordering that this tree be chopped down (Dan 4:10–14). Daniel then explains that the tree symbolizes the king himself who will be exiled from Babylon (Dan 4:16–24). The dream is eventually fulfilled as a voice comes from heaven announcing the onset of the king's exile (Dan 4:28–29). Nebuchadnezzar is then driven out of his kingdom to live alongside the wild animals (Dan 4:30). After this period, Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges the Most High God and is restored to his throne (Dan 4:31–33). Throughout this narrative Nebuchadnezzar is positioned in relation to both various divine beings who all originate from heaven (e.g., the holy watcher, the heavenly voice, the Most High God), as well as animal creatures that are distinct from the human world (who are beneath the tree, and are living in the wilderness). Thus, in some sense, Dan 4 functions as a reflection upon human nature and its position in relation to other categories of beings; perhaps reflecting the same concern voiced by Jennifer Koosed (2014, 3): "What does it mean to be human? We are poised somewhere in between animals and divinities." The human Nebuchadnezzar is somehow distinct from the non-human animals and divine beings.

While the categories of divine, human, and animal seem to be important for the narrative's portrayal of Nebuchadnezzar, the exact boundaries between these different beings are also troubled by the narrative's events. For example, the specific affliction of Nebuchadnezzar is described as an animalizing change—Dan 4:30 describes him being

the case of Dan 4, but they are not traditionally as important for understanding the place of humankind (who are typically bordered by the divine on one side, and animals on the other).

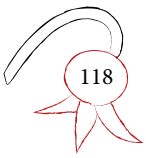
[2] There are various textual editions of Dan 4 but, unless otherwise stated, any quotation from Dan 4 in this article will follow the Aramaic Masoretic text. English translations of this text will be taken from the NRSV but follow the verse-numbering of the Aramaic, and translations of the Old Greek will be my own. For a fuller description of the textual situation, see Atkins 2023.

"driven away from human society ate grass like oxen, …until his hair grew as long as eagles' feathers and his nails became birds' claws." (Dan 4:30). Moreover, it is earlier stated that "his mind be changed from that of a human, and let the mind of an animal be given to him" (Dan 4:13). This curious depiction of the king seems to indicate some kind of movement across the human–animal boundary. However, it is not exactly clear what changes in Nebuchadnezzar or what makes the mind of an animal different from a human's. Thus, while the Danielic narrative is obviously interested in such categories of animal, human, and the divine, the text itself does not exactly determine what constitutes the boundaries between these and instead they appear to be left quite ill-defined. There thus remains some uncertainty over how Nebuchadnezzar's humanity should be understood as distinct from non-human animal and divine beings.

Scholarship on Dan 4 has recently explained aspects of the chapter by utilizing comparative Mesopotamian material. These comparisons have been occasioned in part due to various correspondences between Mesopotamian texts and the events in Dan 4 (e.g., traditions about Nabonidus might underlie the events surrounding Nebuchadnezzar in the Danielic text; Henze 1999, 51–73), as well as the probability that Dan 4 presupposes "a considerable degree of knowledge of the Babylonian world" (Oshima 2017, 647). Some scholars, like Matthias Henze, have read Dan 4 alongside the Babylonian trope of the wild man and argue Nebuchadnezzar undergoes a reversal of the civilizing development of primordial humans (Henze 1999, 93–99; cf., Coxon 1993, 218–20; Ferguson 1994, 325–26). Christopher Hays (2007, 307) disagreed that such a return to primal status might be caused by a divine curse, and instead suggested Nebuchadnezzar's affliction should be understood as using imagery associated with the netherworld. Hector Avalos (2014) has since provided an example from Mesopotamian magico-medical literature of how a primordial state could result from a god's curse. It has therefore been convincingly shown how Nebuchadnezzar reverts to a primordial human state in Dan 4.

These previous studies have built up a picture of how to think about Nebuchadnezzar's affliction in terms of contextual Mesopotamian material, though such work has not thus far been used to make any

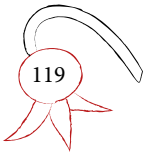
substantial insights into how boundaries between different beings are presented here. For example, despite the work of Henze and Avalos in demonstrating that Nebuchadnezzar effectively becomes a primordial human, neither scholar arrives at a clear understanding of how this state makes the king animal-like or what the functional boundary is that he has crossed in order to be depicted in this way. More recently, Brian DiPalma's study of Dan 4 (2020) brings the chapter into useful dialogue with iconographic evidence but, concerning a human–animal boundary, he says little. Despite stating that "Nebuchadnezzar remains a human being during the ordeal but acts or appears like animals" (DiPalma 2020, 504), DiPalma does not specify what aspects or attributes the king would need to retain in order to keep his human status. One scholar who has perhaps made the most useful comments on how boundaries between different beings work in Dan 4 is Carol Newsom in her commentary on Daniel. Newsom states that: "in ancient Near Eastern thought, the world contains three basic types of being: deities, humans, and animals. Each is distinguished by its relation to knowledge and rationality" (2014, 141). She musters three Mesopotamian texts to support her assertion of these categorical boundaries and then attempts to relate these to Dan 4. While Newsom's work demonstrates perhaps the first attempted use of comparative Mesopotamian material to elucidate the distinctions between divine, human, and animal in Dan 4, there is not actually much scholarship which describes divine–human–animal boundaries in ancient Mesopotamia in the way she proposes. Newsom's comments are therefore reliant upon relatively few ancient texts and her assessment is supported by little contemporary scholarship.



There is thus a considerable gap for a more extended study of such divine–human–animal distinctions in Dan 4 which this article seeks to address. Following the trend in recent comparative Mesopotamian studies, this article will adopt an interpretative-literary approach and read Dan 4 in light of Mesopotamian texts that address divine–human–animal boundaries in terms of the concepts of wisdom and immortality. Firstly, the scholarship and texts which indicate a boundary between divine and human beings based on immortality will be examined, followed by those that indicate a human–animal boundary based on

wisdom. Throughout this study, I will use the term "wisdom" to refer to what Tigay terms "civilizing human rationality" or "the mental capacity which is the source of civilization" (Tigay 2007, 625). Finally, these divine–human and human–animal boundaries will be traced in Dan 4 itself. It will be argued that the portrayal of Nebuchadnezzar in Dan 4 utilizes similar divine–human–animal boundaries to those found in such Mesopotamian texts, and that the king's position relies upon his relationship with both wisdom and immortality. Furthermore, this study of Dan 4 also aims to use this particular biblical narrative to form a basis by which future scholarship can consider similar boundaries to be at work in other Second Temple texts.

Divine–Human Boundary in Mesopotamia



Past work on the ancient boundaries between beings in Dan 4 has, as was previously acknowledged, been sparse. However, attempts have been made to understand the boundary between human and divine beings in the ancient Near East and this scholarship will form a good starting-off point for this article. A prominent example of a previous scholar interested in this area is Johannes Pedersen.[3] His investigations into such divine–human boundaries assessed how ancient Near Eastern and biblical texts depict the relationship between humans and the gods, and concluded that the principal characteristic shared between them was that of wisdom. Pedersen states that the kinship between humankind and the gods "would be complete if [hu]man[kind] were also given immortality," but this would make them "no longer human" (Pedersen 1955b, 244). Thus, for Pedersen, in the ancient Near East humans are similar to divine beings due to their shared wisdom, but are different due to their mortal life.

Subsequent scholars have followed this same general direction and traced ancient Mesopotamian divine–human boundaries by referring to both wisdom and immortality. Shlomo Izre'el regarded the "ability to possess both wisdom (or intelligence) and immortality" as "a

[3] For example, see Pedersen 1955a and 1955b.

privilege of the gods" in ancient Mesopotamian texts (Izre'el 2001, 121).[4] Humankind were permitted to receive wisdom which means that the "only difference between humans and gods is, therefore, the gods' ability to possess eternal life" (Izre'el 2001, 121). Tryggve Mettinger likewise explicitly draws on Pedersen's work and states that in ancient Mesopotamia "humans have wisdom but not immortality. Only gods have both" (Mettinger 2007, 99). These two characteristics are the features that cause humans to differ from the divine. He even takes this line of enquiry one stage further by suggesting the evidence indicates that there was a "common ancient Near Eastern notion of wisdom and immortality as marking out the ontological boundary between gods and humans" (Mettinger 2007, 126), and uses this to assist his interpretation of some different biblical material. While not focussing on wisdom and immortality, the work of Tyson Putthof in examining Mesopotamian conceptions of humanity has seemingly corroborated the idea that humans shared a divine nature to some degree. He argues that humans were conceived of in various texts as being a mixture of both divine and non-divine ingredients. However, despite partaking somewhat in divinity, this did not make humans divine: "To share in the divine nature was one thing. To be a god or goddess was quite another" (Putthof 2020, 83). This scholarship on ancient Mesopotamian texts thus indicates that there was a recognizable difference or boundary between human and divine. A number of scholars suggest this boundary might be conceived of through the concept of wisdom and the uniquely divine characteristic of immortality.

The evidence normally provided in such scholarship for this divine–human boundary is varied and can be found in a range of texts, but only a couple of key examples will be supplied here.[5] One of these is the text of *The Gilgamesh Epic*, which expresses a concern with the possibility of attaining immortality in most of the latter half of the text. After Enkidu's death, Gilgamesh is consumed by grief and the

[4] During his study, Izre'el also cites Pedersen's work on these divine characteristics; see Izre'el 2001, 120.

[5] Other texts that are commonly cited and demonstrate a similar boundary include *The Sumerian Flood Myth* and *The Atrahasis Epic*.

knowledge of his own mortality so seeks to avoid it. In one version he learns that "when the gods created [hu]mankind, for [hu]mankind they established death, life they kept for themselves" (*Gilgamesh* OB VA+BM iii.2–5).[6] Nevertheless, Gilgamesh does find Utnapishti who has acquired immortality. When eternal life was originally granted to him, the gods say "In the past Ûta-napišti was (one of) [hu]mankind, but now Ûta-napišti and his woman shall be like us gods!" (*Gilgamesh* XI.203–205).

A second key text which refers to the divine–human boundary in a similar way is the Akkadian myth of *Adapa and the South Wind*.[7] Fragment A describes how the human Adapa is created by the gods "with great intelligence, to give instruction about the ordinance of the earth. To him he gave wisdom, he did not give him eternal life" (*Adapa* A.i.3-4). This is again signalled in Fragment B when, after refusing the divine food and water of life, the god Anu tells Adapa "Hence you shall not live! Alas for inferior humanity!" (*Adapa* B.68). The common interpretation of this statement is that Adapa has forfeited a chance to receive immortality. This *Adapa* myth describes the same difference between the divine and the human—eternal life is held by the gods but withheld from humans. The divine–human boundary is therefore negotiated in these ancient Mesopotamian texts using the dual concepts of immortality and wisdom, though it is immortality which categorically differentiates divine and human.

Human–Animal Boundary in Mesopotamia

While the human–animal boundary has not received quite the same attention in Near Eastern scholarship, it is also possible to map these same divine characteristics onto this second boundary in similar material. The other key characteristic shared by both humans and the divine in ancient Mesopotamian literature is wisdom or reason, and

[6] English translations of fragments of *Gilgamesh* are taken from George 2003. Unless noted otherwise, quotations are from the Standard Babylonian text.

[7] English translations of fragments of *Adapa* are taken from Izreʾel 2001.

this can be seen to divide the categories of human and animal. While immortality separates humans from gods, wisdom is a characteristic held by humans but absent from animals.

As noted above, this second ancient Mesopotamian boundary has not been investigated in as much detail as the first. Nevertheless, some work has been done in this area. The principal scholar who has observed the relationship of the human–animal boundary with these divine characteristics is, again, Izre'el (2001). He suggests that various Mesopotamian textual evidence indicates that life was a characteristic shared by gods, humans, and animals, however wisdom or intelligence was shared by only humans and gods. The clearest indicator of a being's possession of this wisdom/reason[8] is, according to Izre'el, the use of language (2001, 130–35). Izre'el even helpfully summarizes the way each boundary works in tabulated form (2001, 122–23). This work has recently been significantly expanded by Peter Atkins (2023) who has conducted a wider survey of ancient Mesopotamian literature to demonstrate the prevalence of wisdom/reason as an identifier of the categories of human and animal. He argues that "to transform into a different category of being, and to transgress such conceptual divine–human–animal boundaries, would involve the acquisition or loss of" either wisdom or immortality (2023). The possession of wisdom/reason is thus the signifier of whether a being can be categorized as human rather than animal.

The main textual evidence usually drawn on for such arguments is, again, most commonly found in *The Gilgamesh Epic*. Gilgamesh's friend Enkidu is created in the wild and exhibits many animal-like qualities, such as being covered only with hair (*Gilgamesh* I.105–107) and eating grass like a gazelle (*Gilgamesh* I.110). This strikingly resembles how animals are elsewhere described in Mesopotamian material, for example in *The Sacrificial Gazelle* prayer.[9] Enkidu can clearly be counted among the animals, and when he is depicted it is commonly with

[8] Throughout the rest of the article, this Mesopotamian concept will be referred to as wisdom/reason to encapsulate the various ideas related to it.

[9] The text of *The Sacrificial Gazelle* can be found in Foster 2005, 755–56.

various bestial features.[10] However Enkidu subsequently undergoes an experience of humanization,[11] encapsulated in the phrase "he became like a [hu]man" (*Gilgamesh* OB II.iii.108). This humanization causes the animals to flee from him (*Gilgamesh* I.195–199), and physically affects Enkidu's ability to run with them (*Gilgamesh* I.200–201). Yet it is also signalled by another change: he is described as having "*reason*, he [was] wide of understanding" (*Gilgamesh* I.202). This "reason" has also been translated in some English renditions of *Gilgamesh* as "wisdom" (Speiser 1969, 75). Later it is written that Enkidu's "heart (now) wise was seeking a friend" (*Gilgamesh* I.214). After this humanizing change, the woman Šhamhat says to Enkidu "you are just like a god. Why do you roam the wild with the animals?" (*Gilgamesh* I.207–208). The process of switching from animal to human is signalled by the acquisition of wisdom or reason, which gives him some resemblance to the divine.

This idea that people living without wisdom could be counted among the animals is present in various other texts. A later example is a version of Berossus' third-century BCE *Babyloniaca* which states that people "lived without order like wild animals" (Berossus, *Babyloniaca* 1b.3).[12] This general Mesopotamian view regarding the role of wisdom or reason in separating humans from animals is summarized by Chikako Watanabe, who states "Mesopotamians clearly regarded 'wisdom' as belonging to culture, to the human world…wisdom is attributed to humans, and animals are regarded as incapable of exhibiting this quality" (2002, 156). Thus Newsom's insight (2014, 141), that "in ancient Near Eastern thought," a being's "relation to knowledge and rationality" distinguished it, is useful. Yet this needs nuancing.

[10] For the identification of animal-like iconography of Enkidu, and the debate surrounding it, see Afanasyeva 1971. For Enkidu being counted as an animal here, see Mobley 1997, 221. Further reflections on Enkidu's relationship to the animal world are made in Ponchia 2019.

[11] For the suggestion that Enkidu goes through two processes: humanization and urbanization, see Reiner 1967, 118.

[12] The text of Berossus' *Babyloniaca* cited here is found in De Breucker 2016. For a similar theme of primordial people living like animals, see also Alster and Vanstiphout 1987.

A being's relationship to rationality, or wisdom/reason as it has been called here, determines whether it is classified as human or animal; however, their relationship with immortality is the important factor in determining whether they are human or divine. Both concepts need to be accounted for as they each play a role in constructing these conceptual boundaries.

From this admittedly cursory survey of ancient Mesopotamian material, a general trend in bounding off the realms of different beings can be demonstrated. The gods have both immortality and wisdom/reason, humans have only the latter, and animals have neither.

Divine–Human–Animal Boundaries in Daniel 4

This perceived relationship between divine, human, and animal beings can also be traced in the biblical tradition. This three-tiered system is outlined for example in Ps 8, where humans are described as a little lower than the divine beings, and animals are in turn beneath them. The notion that wisdom/reason is a divine trait which humans possess is emphasized in Prov 30:2–3, "I am too stupid (בער) to be human; I do not have human understanding (בינת), I have not learnt wisdom (חכמה), nor have I knowledge (ודעת) of the holy ones," and also in Ezek 28:1–4, which describes how the prince of Tyre likens his mind to the mind of a god due to his wisdom and understanding.[13] The importance of mortality is made clear in Ecclesiastes, where it is identified as the specific similarity between humans and animals. The Teacher states humans are similar to animals in that "the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies so dies the other" (Eccl 3:19).[14] The clearest biblical example of wisdom/reason and immortality functioning as bounding off different beings might be in the Eden narrative in Gen 2–3, where the twin concepts of wisdom and

[13] For a fuller treatment of how Prov 30 distinguishes humans from animals through their wisdom, see Atkins 2023.

[14] There is, perhaps, a closer general relationship between humans and animals evidenced in Ecclesiastes (e.g., Eccl 10:20). However, it is unlikely that all biblical texts utilized the same divine–human–animal boundaries.

immortality have often been noted by scholars (Mettinger 2007, 60; Day 2013, 41–44). Wisdom is associated with the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and immortality is associated with the tree of life. Humans eat of the first and so gain wisdom, but they fail to eat of the tree of life and so do not acquire immortality. This closely mirrors the role which both wisdom/reason and immortality seem to have in these earlier Mesopotamian texts. For example, after eating the fruit, the humans put on clothing (Gen 3:7), and are driven away from the animals (Gen 3:23–24). This seems to parallel aspects of Enkidu's humanization after he has acquired wisdom/reason; for example, he wears human garments (*Gilgamesh* II.35–35) and loses his connection with the animals (*Gilgamesh* I.195–202). These ancient Mesopotamian boundaries and categories can therefore be detected in biblical material.

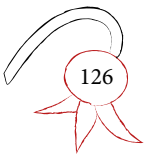
While these concepts and boundaries have been detected in other biblical texts little work has been done on the specifics of these ancient boundaries in relation to Dan 4.[15] However, there are compelling reasons to do so. Firstly, Nebuchadnezzar's primary fault leading to his punishment in Dan 4 appears to be his own hubris and his resulting actions can be seen to directly encroach upon the divine–human boundary.[16] For example, the tree symbolizing Nebuchadnezzar is described as reaching to the heavens (ימטא לשמיא, Dan 4:8, 17; cf. Dan 4:19 and 4:19 OG), a phrase suggestive elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible of a person's proud claim to divine status (e.g., the Babylonian king in Isa 14:13–14, or the tower of Babel in Gen 11). Nebuchadnezzar's hubris in endeavouring to reach to the heavens has even been described as an attempt at self-deification (Hammer 1976, 50) and thus an attempt to categorize himself as divine. The absence of any Babylonian deities in Dan 4 might also contribute to this portrayal. In other Hebrew Bible

[15] The exception to this is Atkins 2023. However, rather than focussing on ancient conceptions of boundaries, recently scholars have begun to address boundaries in Daniel using the lens of contemporary critical animal studies; for examples, see Koosed and Seesengood 2014; Strømmen 2018, 91–108; Beverly 2020.

[16] Not all commentators agree that hubris is the cause of the king's affliction; see Towner 1984, 59–66. For a fuller consideration of Nebuchadnezzar's hubris, see Milanov 2014, 151–77. See also Chike 2022, 392–94.

texts, the omission of the mention of foreign gods can highlight the position of foreign kings who then overestimate themselves and mock God (Hulster 2020, 287). A parallel situation might play out in Dan 4 as, in place of foreign deities, Nebuchadnezzar seemingly inflates himself up to the heavens and thinks too little of Daniel's god.

However, it is also possible to detect how, in this hubris, Nebuchadnezzar grasps for immortality and thus *beyond* the boundary which divides humankind from the divine.[17] The narrative opens with an epistolary section where Nebuchadnezzar introduces the ensuing events and what he has learned from them. In so doing, he emphasizes a particular fact about God's rule: the divine "kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his sovereignty is from generation to generation" (Dan 3:33). The eternity of the divine kingdom is acknowledged by Nebuchadnezzar again at the end of the narrative and once he has reclaimed his own realm. The human king similarly announces that divine "sovereignty is an everlasting sovereignty, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation" (Dan 4:31). As Carol Newsom observes, Nebuchadnezzar seems to have learned from the events that "what distinguishes divine sovereignty from human sovereignty is its everlastingness" (2014, 135).



Furthermore, in addition to acknowledging the Most High God's rule as everlasting, Nebuchadnezzar also refers to the deity as "the one who lives for ever" (ולחי עלמא, Dan 4:31). From his wilderness experience, it therefore seems that Nebuchadnezzar has also learned that God is an everlasting being, or, to put it in other words, he has learned that immortality is a divine characteristic. By referring to the Most High in this way, Nebuchadnezzar is in accord with other Second Temple texts which address the Jewish deity by referring to the immortal nature of the divine (e.g., Dan 6:27; Sir 18:1; also cf. Isa 57:15). However, while this connection between the divine and immortality seems evidenced in other texts of the same period, Nebuchadnezzar's presentation in the preceding chapters of the book of Daniel seems to confound this

[17] This even seems to be explicitly stated in the Old Greek edition of Dan 4 where it is stated that the king's "heart has been exalted in pride and power towards the Holy One and his angels" (Dan 4:19 OG).

identification of eternal life with divinity. When his wise servants address him, they have said to Nebuchadnezzar: "O king, live for ever!" (Dan 2:4; 3:9). This formula for addressing a monarch was common in the ancient world and is employed again in subsequent chapters of Daniel (Dan 5:10, 6:6, 21).[18] Utilized in this way to greet a king, this statement appears to function as a denial of the king's mortality and a simultaneous claim that he is greater than simply human.[19] Curiously, however, this formula of address is absent from Dan 4 as neither Daniel nor Nebuchadnezzar's other courtiers assert the king's immortality when they greet him. When compared to the other Aramaic court tales in Daniel, which all include this formulaic address, Dan 4 is distinctive in the omission of such a royal greeting (cf. Dan. 2:4; 3:9; 5:10, 6:6, 21). These two facts suggest that Nebuchadnezzar's usual assertion of his own immortality (and perhaps divine status) is rectified in the narrative of Dan 4 where he acknowledges that the Most High is actually "the one who lives forever." This reading would also parallel the apparent intent of the narrative to demonstrate the finitude of human rule due to its ultimate dependency on divine endorsement.[20] Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom will not last forever and could be given to whomever God desires (Dan 4:29), whereas the divine kingdom is eternal (Dan 3:33). In a similar way, Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges that he himself is not eternal, whereas the Most High God is immortal. The characteristic of immortality thus seems to be identified by the king in Dan 4 as a uniquely divine characteristic which signifies the boundary between human and the divine. Therefore, the divine–human boundary, which has been detected in ancient Mesopotamian texts and is based around possession of the divine characteristic of immortality, can be seen to

[18] Variants of this formula can be found in other biblical texts (e.g., 1 Kgs 1:31; Neh 2:3) as well as non-biblical texts from across the ancient Mediterranean world; see: Montgomery 1927, 144.

[19] For this claim, see Strømmen 2018, 105. For further reflection on Nebuchadnezzar's problem with his own mortality, see Waller 2020.

[20] For an example of a similar statement of the overall intent of Dan 4, see Collins 1984, 65.

function in the narrative of Dan 4 to indicate the relative position of the categories of human and divine.

The other potential boundary, that which separates humans from animals through the characteristic of wisdom/reason, can also be evidenced in the narrative of Dan 4. The initial place in which Nebuchadnezzar interacts with this human–animal boundary is in Dan 4:13, where the holy watcher announces that Nebuchadnezzar's "mind be changed from that of a human, and let the mind of an animal be given to him" (Dan 4:13). The Aramaic word לבב, rendered here as "mind," can also be translated as "heart" and, in its related Hebrew form לב, has associations with mental faculties.[21] The human mind or heart is linked to knowledge and understanding (e.g., Deut 29:3 or Prov 18:15) but is also the seat of wisdom (e.g., Ps 90:12; Job 34:34), whereas the few cases of an animal לבב have no such link with cognitive abilities. Such a connection between the human mind and wisdom/reason is further suggested towards the end of Dan 4. Once the king has been in the wilderness and endured his affliction for the required length of time, Nebuchadnezzar repeatedly asserts how "my reason returned to me" (Dan 4:31, 33). The fact that his reason or knowledge had to be returned to him suggests that it was lacking during the period when Nebuchadnezzar was given an animal mind. It is possible therefore to notice what the exact difference between a human and an animal mind is within the text of Dan 4: a human mind has reason or intelligence, an animal mind does not.

The possession or nonpossession of Nebuchadnezzar's wisdom/reason signifies the boundary of human and animal, something which is also indicated by the way his affliction is narrated. The majority of Dan 4 is written using the first person and is framed as if Nebuchadnezzar is penning a letter about his experience (cf. Dan 3:31). The only exception to this is during Dan 4:25–30, where the narrative perspective shifts to the third person. Intriguingly, this switch occurs at precisely the same moment as the onset of Nebuchadnezzar's animalizing affliction

[21] Hans Wolff, in his assessment of "heart" in the Hebrew Bible, states that "in by far the greatest number of cases it is intellectual, rational functions that are ascribed to the heart" (Wolff 1974, 46). See also Krüger 2009.

(Dan 4:25) and reverts back to his first-person perspective when his punishment concludes and he announces the resumption of his reason (Dan 4:31). This has been observed by generations of scholars and is usually explained as a literary device indicating that the king could not provide his own account of what happened due to the loss of his rationality.[22] Nebuchadnezzar cannot narrate these events himself because "reason and language are lost in the transformation from human to animal" (Koosed and Seesengood 2014, 185). This explanation for the shift of perspective in Dan 4 is also evidenced in that Nebuchadnezzar speaks no words while undergoing his affliction and, even when it ends, he does not instantly begin vocalizing again. Rather, upon the conclusion of the appointed period, Nebuchadnezzar claims that his immediate response was that he "lifted my eyes to heaven" (Dan 4:31). This might be read as Nebuchadnezzar responding in the manner of an animal instead of an articulated response expected of a human (Newsom 2014, 148).[23] The king's lack of speech during his affliction may even be expressly stated in the variant Old Greek edition of Dan 4 when the heavenly voice tells him that "you will never be seen nor will you ever speak with any human" (Dan 4:29 OG). This evidence all suggests that Dan 4 depicts Nebuchadnezzar as unable to use human language when he undergoes his animalizing affliction and, as language is a key indicator of wisdom/reason in ancient Mesopotamia (Izre'el 2001, 132, 135), it supports the idea that the narrative portrays the king as crossing the human–animal boundary during this period.

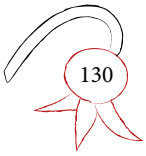
The two key concepts of immortality and wisdom/reason, and the boundaries between categories of beings which they govern, can therefore both be found within the narrative of Dan 4. Immortality appears to factor in how Nebuchadnezzar understands his relationship to the divine. Previous assertions of the king's immortality seem to liken Nebuchadnezzar to the gods, but, in Dan 4, his own admission of the

[22] See Montgomery 1927, 223; Hartman and Di Lella 1978, 174; Fewell 1991, 75. For a longer assessment of Dan 4's change in narration, see Widder 2019.

[23] A potential parallel with the Bacchants in Euripides' *Bacchae* might also indicate that his humanity is restored after this moment; for example, see discussions in Bevan 1892, 96; and Grelot 1994, 12–14.

eternal nature of the Most High God indicates immortality is reserved for the divine. On the other hand, the characteristic of wisdom/reason seems to be absent when the king is afflicted and, as this corresponds with animalizing imagery used about Nebuchadnezzar, indicates the boundary between the categories of human and animal in the narrative. Thus when these characteristics are observed in Dan 4, and the narrative is read in conjunction with the previously demonstrated Mesopotamian construction of divine–human–animal boundaries, Nebuchadnezzar seems to associate himself with the category of the divine but appears to be recategorized as an animal in order to demonstrate his own situation within this schema of classification.

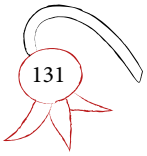
Conclusion



This article has attempted to address and identify the boundaries between different categories of beings in Dan 4 by drawing upon texts from ancient Mesopotamia. A rough structure of categories of different beings has been described: divine beings have immortality and wisdom/reason, humans have only the latter, and animals have neither. Using this as a guide, it has then been shown how the Danielic narrative uses immortality as a key characteristic to separate Nebuchadnezzar from the divine, in much the same way as the Mesopotamian literature examined earlier. Additionally, through the loss of his human reason or wisdom, Nebuchadnezzar also loses the characteristic which makes humans distinct from other animals. He therefore becomes categorically an animal due to the loss of wisdom.

Such connections between Dan 4 and Mesopotamian material do not necessitate any direct link between specific texts and the Danielic narrative – for example, there are not enough precise textual links with *Gilgamesh* to make an argument for direct dependence here (Stökl 2013, 260 n. 10). Nevertheless, this work perhaps reveals something of the context from which this Danielic narrative emerged. Daniel 4 is often viewed as exhibiting knowledge of specific events or texts from the Neo-Babylonian period (Koch 1993, 89–98). However, by demonstrating that Dan 4 operates with a similar schema of boundaries to

that reflected in various Mesopotamian texts (e.g., divine beings are primarily signified by their immortality), this study shows that this narrative has a broader general knowledge of ideas and concepts from a Mesopotamian context. If the narrative within Dan 4 originally circulated independently, and before any Danielic material was collected together (e.g., Koch 1980, 61–66), then it seems likely that its area of circulation was within a context familiar with such Mesopotamian traditions. Thus, the Mesopotamian texts examined in this article might not have any direct relationship with Dan 4 (e.g., as a literary source), but the perceived conceptual understanding shared between these texts and the Danielic narrative indicates a broader influence of this Mesopotamian material here, especially upon how the position of humankind was understood in a world inhabited by various divine and animal beings.



Furthermore, and more importantly for this article, these conclusions concerning the presence of such boundaries in Dan 4, ones that are formed around the concepts of wisdom/reason and immortality, might lead to further reflection upon other literature from the Second Temple period. This Mesopotamian schema of divine–human–animal boundaries might resonate with various other pieces of early Jewish literature. One such example could be 1 En 69:8–11, which could be read as a text about the granting of divine wisdom to humanity along with their mortality. Later in 1 En 84 the everlasting nature of God and God's rule are emphasized (84:2), as is wisdom, which is inextricably bound with the divine presence (84:3). This passage, and its wider context within the Animal Apocalypse, might also be interpreted and understood using this Mesopotamian schema of boundaries and could shed some light upon the later use of animal imagery in 1 En 85–90. The notion of divinely conferred wisdom/reason could also be further found in texts like 4QWords of the Luminaries (4Q504 8.4–5) or Sir 17:6–7, which both suggest a divine origin to human intelligence which is distinctive when compared to how animals are formed. No doubt echoes of this schema of divine–human–animal boundaries could conceivably by traced in various Second Temple texts beyond the examples given here. In studying the categories of divine, human, and animal in such early Jewish texts, it may therefore be fruitful to

reflect on the role that immortality and wisdom/reason play in such literature and, in doing so, these boundaries between beings could be better illuminated.

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