



# Semantic, Pragmatic, and Hermeneutic Approaches to Linguistic Analysis of *Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin* in Aramaic

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## Abstract

The mysterious phrase “*Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin*” from the Book of Daniel has fascinated scholars and theologians for centuries. Despite its significance in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, in-depth linguistic analysis of the phrase in Aramaic texts is still limited. This study aims to bridge the gap between current knowledge and the desired understanding of the phrase’s linguistic structure, semantic implications, and historical context. Using descriptive and historical linguistic analysis methods on ancient Aramaic script, this study seeks to investigate the origins and development of the phrase while evaluating previous interpretations. This study will contribute to the understanding of ancient Semitic linguistics and culture, enriching theological and historical studies related to the Book of Daniel. Through this combined approach, this study aims to shed light on the linguistics, culture, and history in the broader context of ancient Semitic languages and texts, ultimately providing a clearer understanding of the phrase’s use, impact, and social relevance in ancient times. Thus it is found that (1) In ancient Mesopotamian culture, supernatural signs such as the writing on the walls of Belshazzar’s palace were viewed as direct divine intervention in human affairs. (2) This phrase carries a very strong message of criticism against the king. (3) Symbolic meaning for communication and narrative was important for the time. In conclusion. This research enhances the understanding of the Old Testament scriptures and the reception and interpretation of divine messages in specific historical settings. This understanding also opens the stage for further investigation of the correlation between sacred texts and their historical environment. Future scholarly investigations could investigate the social and political impact of divine messages in other ancient textual materials.

**Keywords:** *Mene mene tekkel Upharsin* phrase, linguistic analysis, culture, history, Aramaic.

## Introduction

The background of this research began with the author's interest in the phrase “*Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin*” found in the Book of Daniel. This phrase appeared when Belshazzar, King of Babylon held a party in his palace. Suddenly there was a hand writing on the wall that frightened King Belshazzar, so he called the wise men to read it, but they were unable to. In



fact, at that time Aramaic was the lingua franca in Babylon. This is strange because if the writing on the palace wall was in Aramaic, the wise men in Babylon would have been able to read it, but Daniel 5:5 says that they could not read it. So it is likely that this writing was not written in Aramaic. David Instone Brewer in his paper on cuneiform says that the writing on the wall was probably written in cuneiform, and then Daniel translated it into Aramaic and interpreted it (Brewer, 1991). Daniel interpreted the writing to say that the Babylonian kingdom would fall (Polaski, 2004). This story is important in both Jewish and Christian tradition, but unfortunately in-depth linguistic analysis of this phrase in Aramaic manuscripts is still limited (Polaski, 2004). By examining the linguistic nuances and historical implications through biblical literature and ancient history, this study can gain a deeper understanding of the phrase in Daniel's narrative and its broader implications in linguistic and historical studies. Further research in this area can contribute to uncovering the complexities and symbolism embedded in this mysterious phrase, as well as highlighting its linguistic, cultural, and historical dimensions.

The phrase "*Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin*" has sparked the author's interest in linguistic analysis in Aramaic manuscripts. To answer the research question about the linguistic structure and semantic implications of this phrase in its historical context, a comprehensive linguistic analysis is needed. Relevant studies such as Gandz investigate the phrase in the realm of Babylonian mathematics, highlighting its mathematical potential (Gandz, 1936). In addition, Nöldeke provides valuable insights into the phrase, contributing to a deeper understanding of its linguistic and historical implications (Nöldeke., 1886). By utilizing these studies, the author has the potential to further explore the relevant Aramaic texts, so as to uncover the linguistic intricacies of "*Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin*" as well as its semantic and pragmatic implications in its historical context. Studies of "*Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin*" have been conducted by researchers with varying focuses, but often lack a comprehensive analysis of the linguistic structure in a broader context, such as the theological, historical, and linguistic implications of the phrase.

Linguistic analysis of the phrase in Old Aramaic and related dialects reveals interesting findings, such as the use of asymmetric serial verb constructions with verbs such as "*hllk*" that contribute aspectual nuances (Locatell, 2022). In addition, research has disputed claims regarding the authenticity of certain verb forms in Biblical and Middle Aramaic, which explains the morphological and syntactic complexities of these languages (Mastéy, 2022). Montgomery's study provides a critical and expository commentary on the Book of Daniel, focusing particularly on the phrase "*Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin*" for its theological interpretation and historical implications (Asuquo et al., 2023).

However, Montgomery's work lacks in-depth linguistic analysis, especially regarding the semantic and syntactic structure of Aramaic phrases. To address this gap, a synchronous method utilizing narrative analysis has been proposed in recent studies to analyze the rhetorical use of bilingualism in Daniel, explaining the language shifts and their narrative impact (Scott, 2023). Collins attempts to explore the phrase in historical and theological context, explaining its interpretation in Jewish and Christian traditions (*The Influence and Use of Daniel in the Synoptic Gospels*, 2023). This study emphasizes the historical and political dimensions, especially in relation to the content of the book and the broader religious implications it carries (Amenoum, 2023). By exploring the historical and theological context surrounding the phrase, Collins offers a comprehensive analysis that enriches understanding of its diverse interpretations and implications in Jewish and Christian thought (*The Influence and Use of Daniel in the Synoptic Gospels*, 2023).

Fitzmyer provides valuable insights into the structure of language (DeGrado & Richey, 2022). While Fitzmyer's work offers a detailed examination of various aspects of linguistics, it does not directly address phrases specifically (Morgenstern and Ariel, 2023). But Fitzmyer focuses more on the different linguistic elements present in the Aramaic inscriptions (Morgenstern &



Ariel, 2023). The problems that arise are: How can the hermeneutical method be used to uncover the historical, theological, and symbolic meaning of the phrase “Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin” in the Aramaic manuscript, and how can this approach fill the gaps in previous fragmented research? This study identifies the gap between *das sollen* (the knowledge that should be possessed about the phrase “*Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin*”) and *das sein* (the knowledge that is currently available).

Although there have been several studies, many linguistic, semantic, and contextual aspects of this phrase have not been explored in depth even in Byzantine text (Purnomo, Y., Daliman, M., Sukarna, T., Suparti, H., & Ming, D. 2024). Moreover, considering previous studies, a comprehensive study is also needed by adding pragmatics and hermeneutics. Using descriptive and historical linguistic analysis methods on ancient Aramaic scripts, the researchers aimed to investigate the origins and development of the phrase “*Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin*” while evaluating previous interpretations (*Correlations Between Old Aramaic Inscriptions and the Aramaic Section of Daniel*, 2023). This study will contribute to the understanding of ancient Semitic linguistics and culture, enriching theological and historical studies related to the Book of Daniel (Amenoum, 2023).

The main objective of this study is to reveal the linguistic structure and meaning of the phrase “*Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin*” in Aramaic script analysed in this study, as well as to reveal its historical context and pragmatic function. Paul Prinsloo, “Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin : Researcher Identity and Performance” (2014).in his study investigates how this phrase was used and interpreted in ancient societies, explaining its cultural and social implications at the time (Prinsloo, 2014). By examining the linguistic and historical nuances of this phrase, this study aims to provide a clearer understanding of its use and impact, offering insight into the message it conveyed and its social relevance in ancient times (Prinsloo, 2014).The analysis of these phrases contributes to a deeper understanding of ancient linguistic practices and the cultural resonance of symbolic expressions in historical contexts (Prinsloo, 2014).

## Methodology

This research will involve the application of phonetic methods to palaeographic data sets, assisting in evaluating similarity relationships between different script varieties, including Aramaic (Salman and Hosszú, 2022). In addition, this research will apply phylogenetic modelling to analyse the evolution of Aramaic-like scripts, with a focus on feature engineering to filter elements causing homoplasy and improve the results of cladistic analysis (“A New Feature Selection Algorithm for Evolutionary Analysis of Aramaic and Arabic Script Variants,” 2022). Through this combined approach, this research aims to shed light on the linguistic, cultural, and historical context of ancient Semitic languages and texts.

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languages and texts. The approach methods used include: a) Descriptive and Historical Linguistic Analysis: This study uses descriptive linguistic analysis methods to investigate the origins and development of the phrase, and to evaluate previous interpretations in the context of ancient Semitic history and culture. b) Phonetic Method: This research involves the application of phonetic methods to analyse palaeographic data sets, which helps in evaluating the similarity relationships between different script varieties, including Aramaic. c) Phylogenetic Modelling: This study also applies phylogenetic modelling to analyse the evolution of Aramaic-like scripts, with a focus on feature engineering to filter elements causing homoplasy and improve the results of cladistic analysis. d) Pragmatic and Hermeneutic Approaches: This study identifies the importance of the pragmatic aspects of the phrase, including how its use can convey social, cultural, or political messages in the context of its inscription. A hermeneutic approach is used to uncover the historical, theological, and symbolic meanings of the phrase. By combining these approaches, the research aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phrase "*Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin*" in linguistic, cultural and historical contexts.

## Result and Discussion

### Descriptive and Historical Linguistic Analysis Approach

Semantic and Syntactic Structure of the Phrase "*Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin*" in Aramaic Manuscript. This phrase carries both semantic and syntactic implications. In the context of interpreting the phrase (Prinsloo, 2014) "*Mene*" signifies that God has numbered the days of the kingdom, "*Tekel*" indicates weighing and finding the deficiency, and "*Upharsin*" indicates the division of the kingdom. These phrases exemplify the use of performative sentences in early Aramaic documents (Bhayro, 2013), where the words hold a performative function, directly impacting the situation. The syntactic structure of the phrase conveys a concise and impactful message, reflecting the direct consequences conveyed through the verbs used in the serial verb construction (Locatell, 2022). Understanding the semantic nuances of each word in the phrase and its syntactic structure provides insight into the profound message conveyed in this ancient Aramaic script.

### Syntactic Structure

The phrase "*Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin*" consists of four words, each of which has a specific meaning in Aramaic: The word "*Mene*" (מנא) is the passive form of the verb "מנא" (*mana*), which means "to count" or "to judge." Aramaic is a close relative of Hebrew. In Hebrew, the word "מנה" (*mana*) also means "to count" or "to determine a number." In Semitic languages, the root word "*mana*" has a basic meaning related to the act of counting or determining a number. This is seen in many similar words in other Semitic languages. Etymologically, "*mene*" signifies the precise act of counting or determining with certainty, indicating the importance of counting and judging in ancient Semitic traditions in social and religious contexts (Overmann, 2023). This linguistic connection highlights the importance of the processes of calculation and judgment in Semitic languages, emphasizing the cultural and historical significance of these actions in ancient societies (Overmann, 2023).

The word "*Tekele*" "תקל" is the passive form of the verb "תקל" (*taqal*), which means "to weigh." In Hebrew, the word "תקל" (*taqal*) also has the same meaning, which is "to weigh." The root word "*taqal*" in Semitic languages has a basic meaning related to the act of weighing something on a scale, which in ancient contexts often meant to judge or evaluate the weight or value of an object, and figuratively could mean to judge someone's morals or integrity (Nathan, 2021). This word reflects an ancient practice in which weighing goods on scales was a way of determining the value or worth of something, and was used figuratively to judge the integrity or morality of a person or a nation. The concept of weighing in Semitic languages goes beyond the physical act to encompass the metaphorical evaluation of worth or truth, in which the



practice of weighing goods on scales historically represented a method of determining value or worth, while figuratively serving as a means of judging the integrity and morality of an individual or community (Nathan, 2021).

The word "*Upharsin*" "ופַרְסִין" comes from the root word "פרס" (*peras*), which means "to divide" or "to break." The prefix "ו" (u-) in Aramaic functions as a conjunction meaning "and." In Hebrew, the word "פרס" (*paras*) also has a similar meaning, namely "to divide" or "to break." The root word "*peras*" in Semitic languages has a basic meaning related to the act of dividing or breaking something into parts. From an etymological perspective, the word "*upharsin*" indicates the process of dividing or breaking something into parts. This word reflects the divine act of determining the fate of Belshazzar's kingdom by dividing his power and giving it to other nations.

### Syntactic Analysis

In the Aramaic text, the syntactic structure of this phrase can be seen as a series of passive verbs indicating an action that has or will occur. The basic structure is: ***Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin*** [Verb-Passive] [Verb-Passive] [Verb-Passive] [Conjunction-Verb-Passive]

### Semantic Structure

The semantics of this phrase provide a deeper meaning based on historical and narrative context. In the Book of Daniel, the phrase "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin" is interpreted by Daniel as a divine message foretelling the fate of Belshazzar's kingdom (Amenoum, 2023). The semantic interpretation reveals a profound meaning: "Mene" indicates that God has numbered the days of Belshazzar's kingdom and determined its end. The second "*mene*" indicates a repetition that emphasizes the certainty and imminent execution of this judgment. "Tekel" indicates that God has weighed the kingdom and found it too light. Finally, "Upharsin" indicates the division of Belshazzar's kingdom to other nations, especially the Persians and Medes, with the conjunction "u-" indicating the final consequence of the previous action (Amenoum, 2023). This detailed semantic analysis reveals the complex layers of meaning embedded in this phrase within its historical and narrative context.

### Visual Representation of Syntactic and Semantic Structures

Syntax: *Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin*  
[Verb-Passive] [Verb-Passive] [Verb-Passive] [Conjunction-Verb-Passive]

Semantics:

*Mene*: "Calculated" -> The fate of the kingdom is determined

*Mene*: "Calculated" -> Emphasis on certainty

*Tekel*: "Weighed" -> Kingdom found too light

*Upharsin*: "Divided" -> The kingdom will be divided and given to other nations

The phrase "*Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin*" contains a deep and symbolic message regarding the fate of Belshazzar's kingdom. This Aramaic inscription, as interpreted by Daniel (Schwarz, 1996), signifies divine judgment through the actions that God has taken - numbering, weighing, and dividing (Prinsloo, 2014). The complexity of this message is further highlighted by the challenges in interpreting the precise form of the text, with various theories proposed to explain its structure and meaning (Brewer, 1991). The linguistic correlation between this phrase and other biblical narratives, as well as its occurrence in ancient inscriptions, add a mysterious layer to its semantic structure (Fosdal, 2009). Overall, the syntactic and semantic intricacies underline a powerful and foreboding proclamation of impending doom and the consequences of divine judgment upon Belshazzar's kingdom.



## **Pragmatic Implications of the Use of the Phrase "Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin" in the Historical and Cultural Context of Ancient Mesopotamia**

This phrase has pragmatic implications in the context of ancient Mesopotamian history and culture, especially during King Belshazzar's banquet (Eghdami, 2023). It comes from the Book of Daniel in the Bible, was used as a divine message to convey judgment and disaster upon the king and his kingdom. In the socio-political situation of the time, the message was received as a warning or prophecy, reflecting the belief in supernatural powers and the influence of religion that was prevalent in Mesopotamian society (Mohammed, 2023).

The use of this symbolic language in religious and political communication demonstrates the interweaving of spiritual beliefs and governance, highlighting the importance of linguistic structure and pragmatic function in conveying a powerful message to an audience. By analyzing the historical and cultural context surrounding the phrase, this study aims to shed light on the complex relationship between language, culture, and power dynamics in ancient Mesopotamia, contributing to a deeper understanding of the Aramaic and Mesopotamian traditions (Eghdami, 2023). Pragmatically and in the historical and cultural context of ancient Mesopotamia, the implications of using this phrase include several important aspects:

### ***Religion and Belief***

In ancient Mesopotamian culture, supernatural signs such as the writing on the walls of Belshazzar's palace were seen as direct divine intervention in human affairs (Greer, 2020). Belief in these divine messages and interventions ran deep in the society, as reflected in Belshazzar's horrified reaction to the message written on the palace wall by a divine hand (Greer, 2020). In addition, early medieval thinkers also highlighted the concept of God's just judgment, interpreting disasters as a form of punishment from God, which encouraged efforts at reparation while emphasizing God's character, mercy, and justice alongside judgment in shaping views of law and history (Evans, 2020).

This interplay between supernatural beliefs, divine intervention, and fear of the supernatural underscores the central role of religion and belief in divine judgment in shaping ancient cultures and societies. Thus the story of the end of Belshazzar's kingdom through the divine writing on the wall is a clear illustration of how ancient cultures interpreted supernatural signs as manifestations of divine will, reflecting a deep belief in the active role of the divine in human history and the moral order.

### ***Politics and Power***

**Criticism of the Rulers:** The phrase carries a very strong message of criticism of the king. By interpreting the phrase as "weighed and found wanting," Daniel is conveying that the king's power has been assessed and deemed insufficient or unworthy. This suggests that in the ancient Mesopotamian context, messages like this could be used to convey dissatisfaction with the ruler. The phrase "weighed and found too light" does carry a strong message of criticism of a ruler, suggesting that the king's strength and worthiness have been assessed.

This form of criticism can be contextualized within the broader historical and literary tradition of ancient Mesopotamia and beyond. In the Book of Kings, similar motifs of destruction and loss of national wealth are used to criticize the leadership and decisions of rulers, highlighting their failures and the consequences that result for the nation (Martins, 2022). This literary strategy is not unique to biblical texts but is also evident in Assyrian and Babylonian medical texts, where metaphors such as "his heart is low" are used to describe a state of depression, potentially reflecting the societal view of the ruler's emotional and psychological state (Al-Rashid, 2022).



### ***Transition of Power***

The concept of power transition, as the phrase suggests, reflects changes in political and governmental structures, such as the end of Babylonian rule and the rise of Persian rule. This phenomenon is not isolated to ancient history but is a recurring theme in global politics. Historically, power transitions occur when a rising power achieves economic growth and military power, challenges the existing hegemon and seeks to establish a new order (Khan et al., 2022). In the Book of Daniel 5:30-31, that night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was killed and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom when he was sixty-two years old.

### ***Language and Symbolism***

Aramaic, a language that originated in Western Asia around the 11th to 8th centuries BCE, became the patois of a vast region due to the conquests and extensive rule of the Assyrian Empire, the Neo-Babylonian Kingdom, and the Achaemenid Persian Empire (O'Donnell, 2022). Its widespread use in commercial, administrative, religious, and intellectual spheres facilitated cultural interaction among ancient civilizations, fostering a sense of connectedness throughout Mesopotamia and beyond (O'Donnell, 2022). Holger Gzella's work, "Aramaic: A History of the First World Language," examines the language's evolution over three millennia, emphasizing its role as the standard administrative language during the Achaemenid Empire, which further strengthened its status as a unifying linguistic medium (DeGrado, 2023). The development of Imperial Aramaic, a standard dialect with its own orthographic conventions, underscores an organized effort to maintain linguistic uniformity across a vast territory (DeGrado, 2023).

In addition, the comprehensive textbook "Biblical Aramaic and Related Dialects" provides an in-depth look at the use of the language in the Old Testament and related dialects from the last few centuries BCE, illustrating its continuing relevance in religious and historical texts (*Biblical Aramaic Glossary*, 2022; *Index of Citations*, 2022; *Reading Guide for Biblical Aramaic and Related Dialects*, 2022). This textbook also highlights a methodical approach to learning Aramaic through primary sources such as the Bible, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and ancient Egyptian papyri, further demonstrating the language's wide reach and enduring influence on history (*Biblical Aramaic Glossary*, 2022; *Index of Citations*, 2022; *Reading Guide for Biblical Aramaic and Related Dialects*, 2022). Thus, the use of Aramaic in historical writings not only indicates the cultural and linguistic connectedness of the Mesopotamian region but also reflects the important role of language in shaping communication and administration across ancient civilizations.

**Symbolism:** The phrase "*Mene, Tekel, Upharsin*" exemplifies the profound role of symbolic meaning in communication and narrative, reflecting how words can encapsulate complex concepts and societal values.

Symbolic meaning, as Ferguson (2023) discusses, is integral to human interaction with physical settings, shaping understanding and motivating action through a collection of feelings, drives, and abstract concepts. The sociological perspective of symbolic interactionism further emphasizes that societies are built and maintained through repeated and meaningful interactions, in which symbols play a vital role in conveying shared meanings and facilitating social cohesion (Carter & Fuller, 2016). Thus, the terms "*Mene, Tekel, Upharsin*" are not just words but symbols that encapsulate judgment and destiny, illustrating symbolism in human communication and narrative across contexts and media.

### ***Intercultural Interaction***

**Israel's influence in Babylon:** The period of Jewish exile in Babylon, particularly during the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, was marked by cultural and intellectual exchanges between the Judean exiles and Babylonian society. The Judeans, who were relocated to various parts of Babylonia, including the Jewish settlement, were integrated into the Babylonian economy through the land-for-service system, engaging in agriculture, trade, and administration



(Hinnant, 2022; Spunaugle, 2023). Despite initial hardships and the depiction of their exile as a period of slavery in the biblical texts, recent cuneiform sources reveal that many Jews were able to gradually rebuild their socioeconomic status, with some even participating in local government and trade (Kim, 2022). The Babylonian policy of settling deportees in ethnically homogeneous communities helped preserve their cultural and religious practices, which in turn influenced the development of Judaism during this period (Spunaugle, 2023). The intellectual and religious life of the Judean community flourished, with Babylonian influence evident in the adoption of loanwords and literary forms in biblical texts (Hinnant, 2022).

This period also saw the rise of religious leaders of Babylonian origin, such as Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, (Ezra 1:3-7; Nehemiah 2:4-6:8) who played important roles in the post-exilic restoration of Jerusalem (Xu, 2023). The interaction between the two cultures was thus two-way, with Judaeen traditions influencing Babylonian society and vice versa, leading to a rich tapestry of cultural and intellectual exchange that shaped the future of both communities (Hinnant, 2022; Kim, 2022; Spunaugle, 2023; Xu, 2023). They were in the land of Babylon for seventy years, this appointment had been prophesied by the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 25:11)

### ***Influence of Bible Stories***

The influence of biblical stories on the history and culture of ancient Mesopotamia is profound and diverse. Biblical narratives, as found in the Hebrew Bible, have been instrumental in shaping religious beliefs and cultural norms. For example, stories such as Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:3-5) have been reinterpreted in various communities, reflecting the historical circumstances that guided them, thus influencing Western thought for centuries (Gondar, 2015). The rhetorical nature of the Bible, as Michal Beth Dinkler has argued, underscores its power to convince and shape the values of society, both positively and negatively, through the art of persuasion (Dinkler, 2021).

Furthermore, the imaginative narratives of the Hebrew Bible, which include stories such as Joseph, Ruth, and Esther, were not initially seen as historical fact but rather as biographical or hagiographic accounts that later acquired historical authority, illustrating flexible ideas about what constituted biblical texts in ancient Judaism (Wills, 2016). Collectively, these contexts highlight the Bible's pervasive influence on religious traditions and its broader impact on Western culture and understanding of history, illustrating its role as a foundation for cultural and intellectual development. Thus, the pragmatic implications of the use of the phrase "*Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin*" in the historical and cultural context of ancient Mesopotamia are very broad, encompassing aspects of religion, politics, linguistics, and cultural interaction. This phrase not only functions as a divine message, but also as a tool of social criticism and a symbol of major changes in the history of the region.

## **Hermeneutics of the Use of the Phrase "*Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin*" in the Context of Old Testament Exegesis**

### **Historical and Cultural Context**

Background of the Babylonian Kingdom: The Babylonian Empire, at the time of the writing of Daniel, was at the height of its glory but also on the verge of decline. This period corresponds to the Neo-Babylonian Empire, which controlled much of the Middle East in the sixth century BCE before succumbing to the rise of the Persian Empire (Fayad, 2023). The reign of King Belshazzar, often identified as Nebuchadnezzar's successor, marked this critical point. Nebuchadnezzar II, one of the most prominent rulers of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, had contributed to the empire's greatness through extensive building projects and military conquests (Fayad, 2023). However, the political landscape of Babylonia had been chaotic for centuries, marked by periods of decline and decentralization, especially after the collapse of





the Kassite dynasty in the mid-twelfth century BCE (Brunton, 2023). The Kassite dynasty itself had been a period of adaptation and integration, in which foreign rulers adopted Babylonian traditions to maintain their rule (Paulus, 2022). The ideological and political foundations laid during the Old Babylonian period under Hammurabi also played a significant role in shaping the later metropolis that became the centre of biblical and Greek sources (Boivin, 2022). In addition, the Seleucid Empire, which emerged after the death of Alexander the Great, also recognized the strategic and economic importance of Babylon, deeply embedding it in the context of their empire and mythological narratives (Nicolaidis, 2004; Sivkina & Krivoshchekova, 2023). Thus, the history of the Babylonian Empire is a tapestry of conquest, cultural integration, and ideological significance, culminating in its final days under Belshazzar, as depicted in the book of Daniel, before its eventual fall to the Persians. At the time of Daniel's writing, Babylon was at the height of its power, but also nearing its downfall. This event occurred during the reign of King Belshazzar, who was Nebuchadnezzar's successor.

### ***Babylonian Culture and Beliefs***

The Babylonians, an ancient civilization that flourished between 2000 BCE and 1600 BCE in southern Mesopotamia, had a rich cultural and religious tapestry that was deeply intertwined with their belief in supernatural signs and divination. Central to their divination practices was the examination of sheep's hearts, a method in which specialized priests would predict the future by examining certain anatomical features and interpreting them as omens, a practice that is well documented through the many clay tablets and models used to train oracular priests (Van Gulik, 2023). These divination practices were part of a wider Babylonian semiotic system, in which cuneiform texts and other forms of writing were used not only for communication but also for magical and divinatory purposes, reflecting a sophisticated linguistic awareness among the scribes (*Babylonian Theories of Language*, 2023).

The influence of Babylonian writing and divination extended beyond their borders, impacting areas as diverse as Syrian Mari, Iranian Susa, and the Assyrian trading colony of Kaneš, where local cultures adapted these practices to their needs, indicating a cultural rather than military spread of Babylonian customs (Agustin, 2022). In addition, the Babylonians compiled extensive collections of omens, such as the *Šumma ālu* series, which include interpretations of animal behaviour as a reflection of human society, further illustrating their belief in the interconnectedness of the natural and human worlds (Oh, 2022). Despite the complexity of their religious and oracle systems, it is argued that Babylonian thought did not constitute formal philosophy as understood in later traditions; their texts lack the critical and logical structure characteristic of philosophical discourse, focusing instead on the practical and authoritative aspects of divination and religious practice (Emelianov, 2023). Thus, Babylonian culture was deeply shaped by their elaborate system of divination and belief in supernatural signs, which permeated their daily lives and influenced the surrounding area.

### **Linguistic and Semantic Analysis**

Many people assume that the writing on King Belshazzar's wall was written in Aramaic. Indeed, if we read the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, we find that *mene-mene tekel upharsin* was written in Aramaic. But why couldn't the wise men in Babylon read it (Dan 5:8), even though Aramaic had become the lingua franca at that time. Several opinions have emerged regarding this writing. Calvin said that God had closed the eyes of the Babylonians so that they could not read it, (Calvin, 1852) but there are also those who say that the writing on the wall is cuneiform, this is proven by Brewer, 1991 : 1). The finger that wrote on the wall is not written in the singular, but in the plural, so it is translated fingers (Dan 5:5: *etsba'an*). So not one finger as in Exodus 31:18; Ul. 9:10, where God wrote the Torah on two stone tablets. 2). If the writing is done with fingers, then all the fingers simultaneously write by scratching the wall and will leave a mark in the form of cuneiform writing as numbers that have meaning. The numbers are 60, 60, 1 and ½ which are read as *mina* (60 shekels) - *mina* (60 shekels) shekel (1 shekel) *peresh* (1/2 shekel).(see NW Porteous, Daniel, A Commentary: OTL,London SCM, 1965). 3). The shape



of the cuneiform letter is three vertical strokes of the left hand from the little finger, ring finger and middle finger, followed by a cross made by the vertical of the index finger split in two by the horizontal of the thumb - which is III +. The vertical mark can mean 60, it can also mean 1, depending on the context. Daniel received God's wisdom and wrote III + is 60 60 1 and  $\frac{1}{2}$ .<sup>1</sup> The + sign is the number  $\frac{1}{2}$  in cuneiform. 1 *mina* is 60 shekels. 4). Actually, the combination III + could be 1 1 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  (*shekel, shekel, shekel, peresh*) or 60 1 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  (*mina, shekel, shekel, perais*) or 60 60 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  (*Mina, mina, shekel, perais*) or *mene mene teqel upharsen*. Daniel translates Mene has been calculated. The tackle was weighed on a balance and found to be deficient. Peres your kingdom will be broken up and handed over to the Persians. But because of the divine knowledge that was in Daniel which caused Daniel to call it *mene mene tekel upharsin*. Then Daniel explained the meaning to the king and then wrote it in his book in Aramaic so that it could be read.

## Contemporary Relevance

The phrase "*mene mene tekel upharsin*" appears as a divine message about the coming judgment against Belshazzar, the king of Babylon for his arrogance and wickedness. Schwarz, "*Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin*": Jewish Perspectives in Disraeli's Fiction." Here the phrase has transcended its original context to become a metaphor for a situation in which an individual or entity faces imminent judgment or downfall because of their actions. In contemporary settings, the phrase can be applied to a variety of scenarios, such as political or social contexts where unethical behaviour or injustice is prevalent. For example, the term "*menas*" in Spain, originally a neutral acronym for unaccompanied foreign minors, has evolved into a term with negative connotations, reflecting social prejudice and potential social judgment against a marginalized group (Plou & Vidal, 2021).

Similarly, the concept of "*malée*" in Aceh, which denotes shame and adherence to local religious and cultural values, can be seen as a social mechanism to prevent actions that may lead to communal judgment or ostracization (Dewi et al., 2022). In cognitive psychology, the assessment of mental speed and its correlation with cognitive ability can also be viewed through this lens. The choice of assessment method (paper and pencil vs. computer-based tests) and its validity can be seen as a judgment about the efficacy and fairness of the method in evaluating cognitive ability (Schmitz and Wilhelm, 2019). Finally, in the field of entomology, the discovery and differentiation of new species, such as *Ceranisus amanosus* and *Ceranisus menes*, involves careful assessment based on genetic and morphological data, underlining the importance of accurate scientific evaluation (Doğanlar et al., 2009). Thus, the phrase "*mene mene tekel upharsin*" serves as a powerful reminder of the consequences of actions and the importance of ethical and accurate judgment across a range of domains.

## Conclusion

The phrase "*Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin*" in Daniel 5 carries implications that include historical, cultural, linguistic, and theological contexts. Using hermeneutical, semantic, and pragmatic analysis, it is demonstrated that this phrase communicates divine judgment against King Belshazzar and the Babylonian authorities. This study enhances the understanding of Old Testament scripture and the reception and interpretation of divine messages in specific historical settings. The practical implications of this examination suggest that a comprehensive understanding of ancient texts requires consideration of diverse contextual elements. Theoretically, these results underscore the importance of interdisciplinary methodology in the field of biblical studies. However, this study faces constraints related to the availability of secondary resources and challenges in accessing original manuscripts. Future research efforts

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<sup>1</sup> For introductions to cuneiform numerals see: R. Caplice, Introduction to Akkadian (Biblical Institute, Rome, 1980) 122f. LW King, First Steps in Assyriology (London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Triebner & Co Ltd., 1898), CXXXIII f. (nd). ["No Title," n.d.]



can expand this examination by using advanced archaeological and linguistic techniques to gain deeper insights. Therefore, this analysis not only enhances our understanding of the phrase “*Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin*” but also sets the stage for further investigations into the correlation between sacred texts and their historical environment. Future scholarly investigations could investigate the social and political impact of divine messages in other ancient textual materials.

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