

A study of space in Daniel 1¹

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ABSTRACT

In Daniel 1 the Babylonian court presented a challenge to Daniel and his compatriots to continue serving the Lord as they did in Jerusalem. In the liminal phase of preparation for service in the court they created a strategy to sustain their Judean identity. This article indicates how their scheme of eating their own food was not only created from the ideological space of what Soja calls 'Thirdspace', but was also conceptualised in bodily terms as a theology of containment.

A INTRODUCTION

Space depicted in narratives, is never without ideological meaning. It is always part of the strategy followed by the narrator. Space contributes to the narrator/author's communication of his/her/their ideology. Space not only indicates physical areas, but also has ideological meaning for those who live in it. People extend their beliefs into everyday spatial reality. This study explores the use of space in the narrative of Daniel 1.

B A FOREIGN SCENE

The events in Daniel 1 mainly take place at the Babylonian royal court of Nebuchadnezzar. The king decided to extend his corps of magicians and enchanters with some new blood. He explicitly decided upon boys from the Judean royal family he captured in Jerusalem. He ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his court officials, to select candidates from the Judean exiles, train them for three years at the royal court and prepare them for eventual consideration as officials at court. This was an effective recipe for conflict. Royal Judean lads were to be trained to serve in the Babylonian court. In conflict with their upbringing and religious beliefs, they were to become magicians and enchanters at a foreign court. They were to be educated in the Babylonian culture, its specific language and its ideology of the esoteric.

¹ I dedicate this article to my friend and colleague Jurie le Roux. He is an intellectual and an academic in the true sense of the word.

Strangely enough the conflict is not linked to the foreign land or the Babylonian court as such. The exilic circumstances are taken for granted and even evaluated in religious terms as positive. It was God's decision to let his people be taken away from their homeland into exile. God literally 'gave' (cf 𐤁𐤓𐤁𐤏 Dan 1:2) Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into the hand of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. God also gave some of the vessels of the temple in Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar, who took it to Shinar to the house of his god. This means that the space of Babylon is to be understood in terms of continuation of the life in Judah. Life has come to an end in the Judean homeland and is now continued in the place where God sent them. This space is therefore negative and positive at once. It is negative in that it refers to the punishment meted out by God. It is positive in the sense that it indicates the circumstances willed by God for his people. As Fewell (1988:34) puts it: 'The old story world sets the new story world in relief. Homeland gives way to alien land'.

The foreign space in Babylon is therefore an alternative space in which the relationship with the Lord can still be lived. The Diaspora space presents a challenge to these young Judeans to reconcile foreign circumstances with their born identity. They were in no position to distance themselves from their exilic situation. They had to live under a foreign king in a strange land. The challenge was, however, to accept the foreign space God led them to, while keeping their identity. They had to adapt themselves to these strange circumstances, but had to prevent becoming absorbed in the customs and religion of that place. A specific immunity had to be maintained without withdrawing from the reality of the new circumstances.

The setting at the court is also to be understood in the same terms. Humphreys (1973:211-223) analysed the setting of the story world in Daniel 1-6. He found all of these narratives to be court stories or stories about courtiers. In chapters 3 and 6 there are *tales of court conflict* where one courtier seeks to bring about the ruin of another. In Daniel 2, 4, and 5 there are *tales of court contest* in which one courtier succeeds in some endeavour where all others fail. The meaning of these stories are to 'present a style of life for the diaspora Jew which affirms most strongly that at one and the same time the Jew can remain loyal to his heritage and God and yet can live a creative, rewarding, and fulfilled life precisely within a foreign setting, and in interaction with it' (Humphreys 1973:223). Daniel 1 is also to be read against this background.

C FROM ROYAL SEED TO SERVANTHOOD

The moving of the boys to the king's court had consequences. They had been living somewhere in the Babylonian kingdom. The narrator does not give any information on this. Ashpenaz simply followed the king's orders

and selected young boys from the Judean nobles in exile who satisfied the king's conditions and brought them to the king's court to be educated in the 'literature and language of the Chaldeans' (Dan 1:4). This connotes an intensification of the problems experienced in the Diaspora. As long as the boys were living on their own, they were removed from the direct threat of the Babylonian culture. Now they are physically moved to the centre of Babylonian culture at the palace. The purpose of their training would in the end be to stand physically before the king (JIMh ympl Dan 1:5, 19, cf. also 1:18). They are now shifted into the centre of the foreign setup of which they are to become part.

Fewell (1988:38) refers to this change as a '*rite of passage*' This is a ritual designed to facilitate peoples' passing from one phase of life into another. Usually there are three basic steps in this process. The first is being separated from the community and put in seclusion. During the second temporary phase of 'betwixt and between', the removed persons experience a liminal existence in which they are taught special knowledge that will enable them to function in the new roles they will be assuming. Instructors encourage the initiates to suppress their former allegiances and elevate their new allegiances. They are expected to be completely submissive to their instructors. 'These induced experiences in the liminal stage are designed to bring about a change of being, a change of identity (and thus the symbolic renaming)' (Fewell 1988:38). In the third stage of the passage, reintegration into (the new) society takes place. Verses 5 and 18 allude to such a reintegration.

In this case the rite of passage involves much more than mere professional education for administrative duties at the king's court. The final aim is adaptation to the Babylonian way of life, a profession on the highest level and Babylonian cultural allegiance. For the youths this rite of passage could have meant either a promotion from exiled prisoners to court professionals, or a descent from royal seed to servanthood (cf Fewell 1988:38). If it was a thorough transformation and their original identity was totally erased in the process, it could have meant the former. They were, however, born and educated as Judeans. This rite presented a threat to them of being completely alienated from their people. Being forced as Judean royalty into the service of the foreign Babylonian king would indeed mean a descent from royal seed to servanthood, as Fewell formulated it above. There is, however, a third possibility. In the end Daniel and the others became outstanding officials at court while still upholding their Judean identity. Although they underwent a rite of passage and very successfully became part of the Babylonian court, they corroborated their original identity. They were successfully integrated into the court, but simultaneously kept their national

identity. This dual citizenship was already formed in the liminal phase by the specific measures Daniel took.

D SUSTAINED IDENTITY

Daniel and his fellows from the tribe of Judah became part of the three year preparation program of the king. Although this program must have been comprehensive including all the different aspects of Babylonian life, the narrator singles out the nourishment aspect of the program. Daniel objects vehemently to the king's order that the candidates must eat from his table. The narrator does not indicate what motivated Daniel for this determined reaction. The repetition of the same words at the beginning of both Daniel 1:7 and 1:8 (מִן־הַמֶּלֶךְ), first for the renaming of the lads and then Daniel's reaction to press upon Ashpenaz's heart that he will not eat from the king's table, relates his reaction to the renaming. Both instances imply a change of identity. Fewell derives from this repetition of the verb 'to place', that '...[t]he narrator suggests that the assignment of new identity may be part of what spurs Daniel to show resistance. In other words, Daniel is making an attempt to limit in some way the all-consuming indoctrination process' (Fewell 1988:39).

Daniel did not object to the training he had to undergo, nor to any specific aspect of it other than the orders the king gave regarding the food they are to eat. It is obvious that Daniel was trying to obtain right of say in their training. Already in this liminal phase he prepared to become a successful official at the Babylonian court while sustaining his Judean identity. The question is, however, why was he resisting the probably well intended order of the king to eat the king's food? Why did he focus on food as a way of asserting his identity? This aspect has to be studied next.

Daniel's resolution was that he would not defile himself with the king's food and wine. The ethos of purity in the ancient Near East directed 'each member of a society to respect and observe the system of space and time lines that human groups develop to have everything in its place and a place for everything' (Pilch 1993:151). This ethos can also be described as 'holiness'. To cross the lines that demarcate this system renders a person impure and unclean. Purity is threatened at the margins when these boundaries become porous and permeable. Body openings are at the very margins of the human body and endanger man's purity. To put the king's food in his mouth would mean that Daniel breaks down these cultural barriers and renders himself impure.

The king's food had no danger of bringing any bodily harm or physical illness to the Judean men. It is not even stated what the king's food comprised. Being food from the king's table it would have been the best and

choicest food proverbial fit for a king. On the other hand the eventual success of Daniel and his colleagues could not be attributed to the substance of the food of their choice, i.e. vegetables and water. The nutritional value of these does not guarantee that someone would be 'better in appearance and fatter in flesh' (Dan 1:15) than those who eat the kings' food and that within just ten days. It was therefore not the *substance* of the food and wine to which Daniel objected. It was rather with the source of the food that Daniel expressed his dissent (cf Fewell 1988:40). This represents the king and everything he stood for². It is what the food represented that endangered Daniel's purity. The cultural boundaries he erected around himself would be crossed by the foreign customs of the king. It would become part of the Judeans' life. It would be totally out of place and would render them impure and unholy. Put in different terms, taking this food 'would be tantamount to declaring complete political allegiance' (Fewell 1988:40).

This liminal stage of preparation for their eventual position can also be seen in terms of a liminal space. Being at the court of the king and totally subjected to the training program the king prescribed, Daniel tries to create a personal space for him and his fellows that would allow them to still hold up the spiritual boundaries that keep their holy identity intact. Daniel's resistance 'is an attempt to express some kind of personal control in a seemingly uncontrollable situation' (Fewell 1988:40). Within a foreign cultural-religious space he tried to create a personal space controlled by his beliefs of purity and holiness. The physical space at court represented a cultural-religious system that had to be accepted as the world God sent them to live in, but had to be prevented from becoming part of the Judeans' inner life. To defend their religion they had to fall back on the Judean customs of kosher rules. Clearly different spaces, physical as well as mental, are intended here. To understand this aspect we shall have to turn to spatial theory.

E SPATIALITY

In his study of 'Thirdspace', Soja (1996) follows the ideas of Henry Lefebvre of combining historicity, sociality and space into a triple dialectic. We are 'intrinsically spatial beings, active participants in the social construction of our embracing spatialities' (Soja 1996:1). Not only the historical and the sociological aspects are important, but there is a 'growing awareness of the simultaneity and interwoven complexity of the social, the historical, and the spatial, their inseparability and interdependence' (Soja 1996:3). No longer ready to think of reality only in binary terms, but keeping open the third dimension of 'the other', Soja (1996:10) aims at 'the ontological, epistemological, and theoretical rebalancing of spatiality, historicity, and sociality as all-embracing dimensions of human life'.

² Lacocque (1988:28) sees food as a symbol of one's culture.

Under the heading 'Trialectics of Spatiality', Soja (1996:53f) explains that the use of spatiality along with historicity and sociality implies that space no longer merely indicates physical place, but becomes part of the dialectic of the lived and the conceived, the 'real' and the 'imagined', the material world and our thoughts about it (cf Soja 1996:61). Physical space joins mental space to become social space. Using space as co-ordinate in thinking about reality, in a 'trialectics of spatiality', it is insisted 'that each mode of thinking about space, each 'field' of human spatiality – the physical, the mental, the social – be seen as simultaneously real and imagined, concrete and abstract, material and metaphorical' (Soja 1996:64).

Soja (1996:65) discerns three levels of space in this 'dialectically linked triad': Spatial practice (also called 'perceived space' or 'First Space'), Representations of Space (also called 'conceived space' or 'Second Space') and Spaces of Representation (also called 'lived space' or 'Third Space').

Spatial practice reflects human activity to order the place in which he lives. It can be seen in the network of roads he creates, his working-places, his private areas and his recreational spheres. According to Soja (1996:66) this 'materialized, socially produced, empirical space is described as *perceived* space, directly sensible and openthe traditional focus of attention in all spatial disciplines and the material grounding for what I describe as Firstspace'. This physical space is experienced in terms of empirical measurable configurations working with surface appearance, location, measurements, design and geography.

The second level, the representation of space, refers to conceptualised space. It is mental space. Soja calls it 'Secondspace'. This space is understood in terms of epistemologies distinguished '....by their explanatory concentration on conceived rather than perceived space and their implicit assumption that spatial knowledge is primarily produced through discursively devised representations of space, through the spatial workings of the mind' (Soja 1996:78-9). This is the space that represents power and ideology, control and surveillance. For Soja (1996:67) this is '....the primary space of utopian thought and vision, of the semiotician or decoder, and of purely creative imagination of some artists and poets'. The material world becomes signifiers to the mental processes where ideas and meaning is projected from conceived or imagined geographics into the empirical world. This is the ideational space from which physical space is interpreted.

The third level, space of representation, also called 'Thirdspace' by Soja, encloses perceived, conceived, and lived space. Epistemologies used on this level come from a 'sympathetic deconstruction and heuristic reconstitution of the Firstspace-Secondspace duality' (Soja 1996:81). The ap-

proaches used for First and Secondspace are reinvigorated from ideas in Thirdspace to spatial knowledge with new possibilities heretofore unthought of. Both Lefebvre and Soja see this lived space 'as a strategic location from which to encompass, understand, and potentially transform all spaces simultaneously' (Soja 1996:68). From the ontological trialectic of Spatiality-Historicity-Sociality total new heuristic avenues can be opened up.

In the narrative of Daniel 1 Babylonia, the court of the king at Babylon, and the people living there, are all in the Firstspace. This perceived space can be located on any ancient Near Eastern map. The Babylonian empire can be linked to the era between 609 and 539 BCE. The socio-cultural setup can be studied *inter alia* with the results of social scientific investigation.

The conceived Secondspace comprises the meaning attached to the physical spaces of the foreign land, the court, the food of the king, the dietary customs followed by Daniel and his colleagues. The exilic scenario and the court where the training takes place, present two different meanings in the narrative. On the one hand it offers the opportunity to the Judean boys to be promoted to the highest possible position in a foreign land. In continuation with their lives in Jerusalem, this is an alternative opportunity to live before God. The successful completion of their training is overstated by the narrator in Daniel 1:19-20 as better by far than anybody else's. On the other hand both the country and the court represent the power of the Babylonian king. The food from the king's table is seen as a severe threat to Daniel's beliefs. Their resistance to eating this food and eating food of their own choice reflect resistance to the Babylonian way of life. The king's food as well as Daniel's food of choice symbolise the clash between two opposing cultural-religious worlds.

The meaning of the physical items in Firstspace indicated above, experienced on the level of Secondspace, are dictated by the ideas existing in Thirdspace. Formed by their Judean ideas on religious identity their Thirdspace was the strategic location from where they transformed the perceived space and the conceived space they lived in (cf Soja 1996:68). The food measures used for First and Secondspace were reinvigorated from the ideas in this Thirdspace. When they were still in their homeland, they could set up rules and regulations for the temple, sacrifices, worship, etcetera, that could function as indicators of the boundaries for their identity. In the Diaspora situation their system of purity and holiness had to be replaced by different measures such as those regulating their eating customs. This was the obvious way for the Judeans to express and protect their religious identity, keeping the balance between opportunity and protection in a foreign land. From their ideas in Thirdspace they projected rules for the specific food and drink they put on their table (Firstspace) to create a

Secondspace of exclusive values in which their identity is entrenched. In the historical situation in Babylonia with its specific sociological structures Daniel and his three associates are depicted as the heroes who could hold their own and even surpass others in success due to the personal space they created around themselves.

The question, however, still remains why they explicitly chose food regulations in maintaining their identity. Why was the space they created for themselves in this foreign context conceptualised in terms of the nourishment of their bodies? This brings us to a next section where space is defined in terms of the embodied mind.

F THE EMBODIED MIND

It was indicated above that man gives meaning to the space in which he lives. This meaning can be conceptualised in terms of his body. The human body moves in surrounding space and man tries to understand his environs in terms of his own body and its movements in surrounding space. His movements show patterns like going in and out, up and down, near and far, turning left and right, moving to the front and back, towards and away from objects. These repeatable spatial and temporal organizations lead to image-schematic structures. Using his creative powers man assigns meaning to the world he lives in. This exercise is usually structured according to our bodily experience. Johnson (1987:xiv) therefore talks about ‘embodied, imaginative understanding’. By his mere presence in the world the human being ‘imposes a schema on space’ (Tuan 1977:36). As a person sees himself as the centre of his world, ‘...circumambient space is differentiated in accordance with the schema of his body’ (Tuan 1977:41). We develop meaningful structures for understanding our lives ‘...chiefly at the level of our bodily movement through space, our manipulations of objects, and our perceptual interactions’ (Johnson 1987:29).

Johnson (1987:xvi) studied the ‘more important embodied imaginative structures of human understanding that make up our network of meanings and give rise to patterns of inference and reflection at all levels of abstraction’. Most of these imaginative structures are based in the repeatable organization in our experience of moving into and out of something. This ‘in-out’ pattern links with our view of our bodies as three-dimensional containers in which we put things (food, water, air), and from which other things come forth (blood, air, saliva). This is projected on the world by conceptualising the objects around us in terms of containers. We move out into the world and we go into our houses. We get into our cars and get out of them. This dimensional experience of our bodies and the space in which our bodies move, leads to image structures in which ‘containment’ and ‘boundedness’ play a main role.

According to Johnson (1987:22) this image-schematic structure of containment, based on an in-out orientation, results in the following schemas:

- Protection. Being contained in something implies protection against external harmful powers. Money in your purse is protected against theft from outside.
- Restraint. Powers contained in an object is restrained in its container preventing harm done to something on the outside. A prisoner kept in jail is restrained from harming people on the outside.
- Relative fixity of Location. Power is restricted to one specific area. The fish is kept in its bowl and the coffee in its mug.
- Perceptible/ invisible. Fixed localisation in a contained space implies that it is either accessible for others or restricted from them.
- Logical transfer. If B is inside A, whatever is inside B is also inside A. If you are in bed and your bed is inside the room, then you are inside the room.

As we are basically dealing with a process of ‘entailment’ (Johnson 1987:22) where bodily experiences are developed into image schemata, the prolongation of these basic physical schemata into the world of the non-physical is important. For Johnson (1987:101) ‘...the issue of cognitive reality of image schemata and their metaphorical extensions is central to my project’. The basic physical scheme is extended from the point of orientation (‘landmark’ – cf Johnson 1987:34) by a ‘trajector’ (Johnson 1987:34) that is not necessarily physical or spatial, into complex structures of meaning. From the basic cohesive schemata used for bodily experience image schemata are formed that are coherent and significant.

One area where metaphorical extension of basic bodily schemata is found, is where power is experienced. This is the field of movement, direction of action, levels of intensity and causal interaction. According to Johnson (1987: 47-48) the following seven image schemata can be indicated:

- Compulsion. When power is exerted in a specific direction and forces one into the same direction.
- Blockage. When power is stopped and it becomes necessary to either subject it or redirect it into a different direction.
- Counterforce. Direct confrontation takes place.
- Diversion. An opposing power forces diversion into a new direction.

- Removal of restraint. When restriction to power is removed.
- Enablement. The experience of power to manipulate others where there is a lack of opposition.
- Attraction. The ability to overpower others in your favour.

Each of these is founded on the physical experience of power. This experience is metaphorically extended into highly structured schemata in which words like ‘must’, ‘can’, and ‘may’ play an important role. We understand the mental processes of reasoning in these schemata therefore ‘as involving forces and barriers analogous to physical and social forces and obstacles’ (Johnson 1987:53). In them the root meaning of force and barrier are metaphorically transmitted to the epistemic level.

In terms of Soja’s spatial theory above and the conceptualisation of that space in terms of the human body, bodily experience taking place in Firstspace is projected by the embodied mind unto the level of Secondspace and Thirdspace. In turn physical action in Firstspace and the assigning of meaning to these actions in Secondspace is directed by the embodied conceptualised ideology in Thirdspace.

G CONTAINMENT AS STRATEGY

At the back of Daniel’s resistance to eat the king’s food lies an in-out pattern. The body is a container. To eat from the king’s table would mean to take food into his body that would disturb his containment. Purity rules held up the boundaries of his mental space of holiness. Now he is confronted by a threatening power in the form of the king’s order to eat his food. This food is an external harmful power that should be prevented from entrance into their bodies. If consumed in their bodies, according to the logical transfer schema stated above, this food and what it represents will become part of them. This would break down his containment and make his world come apart. His own food will keep his containment intact and act as measure against external powers entering his body and destroying his Second- and Thirdspace world. His refusal is therefore based on the above-mentioned image schema of protection (cf Soja 1996:22). It is neither the physical substance of the food nor their physical bodies that are endangered here. It is their mental bodies and their idea world that is endangered and should be protected at any possible price.

When the official answers upon Daniel’s denial, he uses the term ‘my lord’ (*ynda* Dan 1:10). This reflects the use of the name of the Lord in verse 2 (*ynda*). The use of the same word indicates that the allegiance to the king at the top of the political hierarchy comes into conflict here with Daniel’s

viewpoint in whose world the Lord is at top of that hierarchy. In Daniel's physical resistance to consume the king's food a battle is depicted that actually takes place not only on material level but especially on ideological / theological level. Daniel refuses to take the material food into his physical body, but in terms of Johnson's (1987:47-48 see above) seven image schemata this is a direct confrontation on metaphysical level where compulsive power is met with a counterforce. Daniel's refusal literally to take in the king's food and his proposal rather to eat different food of his own choice, is the effort of an opposing power to divert the king's power into another direction. Thanks to the favour and compassion God gave to Daniel in the sight of the Babylonian officials, a direct physical confrontation between Daniel and the king was averted. The confrontation is, however, diverted to the metaphysical level – which Daniel won!

A circular movement is found in the mental processes taking place here. The events experienced in physical Firstspace are projected onto a second level of symbolic meaning and a third level of ideological opinion. The choice of the physical food Daniel wanted to eat and the opposition to edible food from the king's table were dictated from the overarching ideology in Thirdspace conceptualised in terms of containment ideas formed from basic bodily experiences of moving in and out. From the bodily experience of containment the idea is developed of what Coetzee (2004:521) calls a 'theology of containment'. In their ideological thinking and conduct Israel thought of themselves in bodily terms as a united and whole body contained in their relationship with Yahweh. This theology is propagated and illustrated in the narrative of Daniel 1 indicating how Judeans can vindicate their identity in the Diaspora creating their own world /space within foreign worlds.

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