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Abstract Review of *The Sealed Book of Daniel Opened and Translated: The Linear Bible Code—Reading the Book Backward* (2007), edited and translated by Gustav Mahler.

FORWARD OR DRAWROF?

Stephen D. Ricks

Review of Gustav Mahler, ed. and trans. *The Sealed Book of Daniel Opened and Translated: The Linear Bible Code—Reading the Book Backward*, rev. ed. Dove Creek, CO: Mahler House, 2007. 474 pp., with register of names and subjects and notes on the text. \$16.95, 1st ed. (hard copy); \$12.95, rev. ed. (on CD-ROM).

In the midnineties, Michael Drosnin's illuminating book *The Bible Code* appeared.¹ It created an instant international sensation. In the book, Drosnin—inspired by the researches of Israeli mathematicians Eliyahu Rips, Doron Witzum, and Yoav Rosenberg—argued that there is a “code” embedded in the text of the Hebrew Bible. This “code” is discovered by searching for equidistant letter sequences (ELS). Thus, for example, we may begin with a letter (“L”) and read every nth letter (“N”) thereafter in the book, not counting spaces. If an entire book such as Genesis is searched, the result is a long string of consonants (the languages of the Old Testament, Hebrew and Aramaic, are represented in the original biblical text only with consonants, without any vowels). Further, by employing different values for L and N, one can generate many strings of consonants.²

1. Michael Drosnin, *The Bible Code* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997).

2. Robert Todd Carroll, *The Skeptic's Dictionary: A Collection of Strange Beliefs, Amusing Deceptions, and Dangerous Delusions* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2003), 52–55. One may be committed to the inspiration of scripture but still approach the implications of “equidistant letter sequences” for the meaning and interpretation of the scriptural text with caution and care.

The proximate inspiration for the writing of Gustav Mahler's *The Sealed Book of Daniel Opened and Translated* was Drosnin's 1999 publication of a second volume, *The Bible Code II: Countdown*, in which he states, "read the letters in reverse."³ Gustav Mahler—a native of New York, a graduate of Ricks College (now BYU–Idaho) and BYU, and currently a member of the staff at Utah Valley State College in Orem, Utah—was first introduced to the Hebrew language under the able tutelage of the venerable instructors Ellis Rasmussen and Gabriel Tabor.

Mahler created a "back text" of the book of Daniel by stringing the letters of the book—which is written in both Hebrew and Aramaic—in order, eliminating the spaces between the words, reversing the order, and translating the text of the book in reverse. The result was this publication, one of a series of several prospective translations and commentaries on "back texts" of the Hebrew Bible. In his introduction to the book of Daniel, Mahler—who, though claiming no direct religious affiliation, describes himself as "a convert to the Jewish faith"⁴—describes the pattern that will be followed in his translation of the "back text" of Daniel.

As an example, Mahler renders the first verse of Daniel 1 in English as "In the third year of the reign of Jehoikim king of Judah" (p. 20). The "back text," translated into English, reads, "Give you a joyous shout O Palaces on account they (*the oppressed*) obeyed. A lamentation of the Mark-of-All-of-Them is for the dividing into three the jackal. Repent thou!" (p. 21). The final verse of Daniel (12:13), rendered in the "forward text" as "And thou, go thou to the end and rest thou and stand at thy allotted portion at the end of days" (p. 21), is translated in the "back text" as "Wailing is from YAH! Distress is for thee to tread the blood of His Time. The Mark loathes distress for thee at his chamber" (p. 22). The entire book follows this same format. But is the meaning of the "back text" more compelling than that of the "forward text"? Some may be persuaded that the meaning of the "back text" is more compelling, but I am not convinced.

3. Michael Drosnin, *The Bible Code II: Countdown* (New York: Viking Books, 1999), 247.

4. Personal communication from Gustav Mahler.

I have a further question: since much of the book of Daniel (2:4–7:28) is written in Aramaic, why does Mahler translate the “back text” as though it were Hebrew and not Aramaic? Given the relatively free syntax of Imperial Aramaic (and the relatively restrictive syntax of Biblical Hebrew), could it not more easily and justifiably be translated as Aramaic?

The Sealed Book of Daniel Opened and Translated is a testament to the industry and linguistic skill of the author. Mahler demonstrates great skill and real finesse in his translation of the “back text” of Daniel. But sometimes Mahler’s renderings of the “back text” press the boundaries of clear sense. I must frankly confess that I lack Mahler’s neo-Kabbalist enthusiasm: given the choice between reading the “forward text” of Daniel in Hebrew and Aramaic (which I regularly do with my biblical Aramaic students) and the “back text,” I prefer the “forward text.”