



*Reviews of the Enoch Seminar 2015.10.13*

**Katharina Bracht and David S. du Toit, eds., *Die Geschichte der Daniel-Auslegung in Judentum, Christentum und Islam: Studien zur Kommentierung des Danielbuches in Literatur und Kunst*. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 371. Berlin / New York: De Gruyter, 2012. Pp. xi + 394. ISBN: 978-3-11-019301-5. Hardcover. €139, 95 / \$196.00.**

**Carla Sulzbach  
Research Fellow in Ancient Textual Studies at  
North-West University, Potchefstroom  
South Africa**

This volume contains the proceedings of a conference held in Berlin in 2006, aiming to provide an interdisciplinary overview of the reception- and interpretation-history of the Book of Daniel through the ages and within different traditions. It focuses on the aspects of Daniel that continued to speak to the imagination, such as individual salvation and the ongoing riddle of identifying the fourth and final world-empire. The periods under scrutiny cover “the ancient Church, the Middle Ages and the Age of the Reformation up to the Modern Age” (vii). Regrettably, Newton’s early eighteenth-century treatment of Daniel constitutes the volume’s most recent interpretation. It would have been welcome to have seen at least one essay on contemporary fundamentalist interpretations of Daniel, illustrating how the message and codes of the book hold an interest for some of today’s faith communities.

The sixteen papers in the volume are organized under the rubrics of 1) the base text, 2) earliest reception, 3) ancient Church, 4) Middle Ages, 5) Reformation, and 6) Modernity. This chronological division promises more than it can deliver; an arrangement according to historical denominations perhaps would have better reflected the diversity in interpretations. Yet is an interesting, if somewhat eclectic, collection, the main thrust of which centers on early and late-medieval Christian, especially Reformist, interpretations. The broad focus on patristic, late-medieval and early-modern Christian approaches makes this volume a useful research tool. But the title’s claim of including Judaism and Islam is only manifested in two essays dealing with the former and one with the latter. The great importance of Daniel in the Karaite Jewish tradition is

left unaddressed.<sup>1</sup> One also looks in vain for mention of the obvious popularity Daniel enjoyed at Qumran,<sup>2</sup> the later pseudo-Daniel traditions,<sup>3</sup> or the literary afterlife of Danielic themes in later pseudepigraphic texts.<sup>4</sup> However, despite these omissions, the volume's contributions tie in nicely with each other and we learn that there is a continuum in the interpretation of Daniel's prophetic parts.

Of special interest to Daniel interpreters has been the question of how its message addresses their own reality and future. Thus the enigmatic fourth (and fifth) kingdoms are successively explained as being the Roman Empire, the Holy Roman (German) Empire as its logical extension, and lastly – since the contributions on this topic do not deal with the period beyond the early seventeenth century – the Ottoman Empire. In the same fashion, the evil king, who in Daniel 11 is Antiochus IV, also becomes a cipher for the choice of either a contemporary evil leader or (only in the Christian interpretations) an eschatological Antichrist figure, the favourites being the Papacy (very popular in Reformation commentaries), the Turk, or, an unidentified evil end-time figure. Likewise, the cryptic chronological references in Daniel have led commentators to speculate widely as to the coming of the Eschaton in their own time.

In the opening chapter, “Das aramäisch-hebräisches Danielbuch: Konfrontation zwischen Weltmacht und monotheistischer Religionsgemeinschaft in universalgeschichtlicher Perspektive” (3-27), Klaus Koch prioritizes the predictions concerning four successive kingdoms; political predictions that would take on a life of their own. Christian theologians after the ‘triumph of Christianity’ applied them to each new successive evil empire. Koch passes through the Middle Ages, stopping briefly in modern times. Next he addresses the theology of the book, which reserves the power of action for the Deity whereas the common folk are called to passive resistance. Finally, Koch deals with the genre apocalypse and notes the symbolic visions and the function of their eschatology. Regrettably, his overview does not address the enduring importance that Daniel retained in Jewish interpretative circles throughout the ages.

The next two papers discuss the reception of Daniel in early Judaism and early Christianity. In “Die Rezeption des Danielbuches im hellenistischen Judentum” (31-54), Michael Tilly discusses the Greek versions of Daniel, the “Additions to Daniel” (Susannah, Bel and the Dragon, the Prayer of Azariah, and the Prayer of the Three Men in the Fiery Furnace), and Josephus' portrait of Daniel. He also addresses the question of Daniel's prophetic status. While the Christian codices place Daniel with the prophets, the Jewish canon relegates it to the Writings. Only Josephus clearly accords Daniel prophetic status (48).

---

<sup>1</sup> E.g., Haggai Ben-Shammai, “Fragments of Daniel al-Qumisi's Commentary on the Book of Daniel as a Historical Source,” *Henoch* 13(1991): 259-282. D.S. Margoliouth, *A Commentary of the Book of Daniel by Jephth Ibn Ali the Karaite* (Anecdota Oxoniensia; Oxford: 1887 [Arab. Text]; 1889 [English trans.]). Adrian Schenker, “Der Karäer Jafet ben Eli, die Buyiden und das Datum seines Danielkommentars,” *BEK* 1(1983): 19-26.

<sup>2</sup> Eugene C. Ulrich, “Daniel Manuscripts from Qumran,” *BASOR* 268 (1987): 17-37; 274 (1989): 3-26; Lorenzo DiTommaso, “4QPseudo-Daniel” (4Q243-4Q244) and the Book of Daniel,” *DSD* 12(2005) 2: 101-133; Peter W. Flint, “The Daniel Tradition at Qumran,” *Eschatology, Messianism, and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (C.A. Evans and P.W. Flint, eds.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 41-60 and many more.

<sup>3</sup> Lorenzo DiTommaso, *The Book of Daniel and the Apocryphal Daniel Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Lorenzo DiTommaso, “Dating the Eagle Vision of 4 Ezra: a New Look at an Old Theory,” *JSP* 20 (1999): 3-38. Another work a mention of which should have been expected is G.K. Beale's *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1984), which treats various Qumran texts (especially the War Scroll), as well as *1 Enoch*, and *4 Ezra*, and *2 Baruch*.

In “Die Danielrezeption in Markus 13” (55-76), David S. du Toit highlights the topical and lexical indebtedness of Mark 13 to chapters 7-12 of the Greek versions of Daniel and how these traditions were reapplied to fit the Markan eschatology, which in turn is presented in the text as a predicted event. A key passage here is Mk 13:26, which identifies Jesus as the Son of Man of Dan 7:13. Du Toit suggests that the obvious intertextuality is an early witness of Christian Daniel interpretation, rather than just part of the book’s reception history.

The next four papers address early Christian commentaries. Katharina Bracht discusses the purpose of the oldest surviving commentary on Daniel, written by Hippolytus of Rome, which is a warning and encouragement to remain loyal and faithful under conditions of persecution (79-98). Hippolytus is uninterested in end-time calculations and stresses that it is forbidden to seek that which is hidden. However, when dealing with the eschaton (in his comments on Daniel 7-12), he places it so far in the future that it becomes irrelevant to his contemporaries.

Phil J. Botha’s discusses Ephrem the Syrian’s 4th-century commentary on Daniel (99-122), which stands out for its historical approach to the text. In Dan 1 the commentator comes up with an original solution to the question of the diet of Daniel and his friends, which he sees in the area of fasting rather than dietary law, arguing that if the latter had been at issue they could have requested acceptable food. Instead, the fasting is connected to other passages that stress this ritual in relation to mourning and prayer (104). A central theme is the certain fall of human hubris in the face of the might of God. However, all this is subordinate to a Christological reading of symbols that are recognized in the text.

Régis Courtray addresses “Der Danielkommentar des Hieronymus” (123-150), composed in the early 5th century in part as a refutation of Porphyry’s tract “Against the Christians.” The exegetical focus is mainly historical. Jerome witnesses the end of the West-Roman Empire by the onslaught of barbarian European tribes, an event of apocalyptic proportions which is reflected in his commentary. Up to Daniel 11:20 Jerome reads the text historically and after this, eschatologically. The references to Antiochus are seen as applying to the Antichrist.

Robert C. Hill’s essay (151-163) treats Theodoret of Cyrus’s commentary written in the 430s. As Hill describes, one of Theodoret’s main drives was to restore Daniel’s status as prophet, something that he blames his Jewish contemporaries for having taken away from him, unlike “the Jews of old” (like Josephus) who recognized Daniel as a prophet. He surmises that the reason for Daniel’s demotion had to do with his prophecies that, when read Christologically, predict a Christian victory over the Jews. In trying to understand Theodoret, Hill records a private discussion with Chaim Milikowsky where he introduces a number of relevant Jewish approaches regarding Daniel’s status. Further, in insisting on reading Daniel in a historical manner, Theodoret stumbles many times in his attempts at harmonizing what we now know to be apocalyptic data.

The next set of essays move into mediaeval times. In “Bemerkungen zu Daniel in der islamischen Tradition” (167-178), Hartmut Bobzin treats a number of admittedly weak passages that might indicate knowledge of Daniel in Islam. He first adduces the title “Seal of the Prophets”, given to Muhammad in the Qur’an, Sura 33:40 and suggests that its source may be

found in Dan 9:24 and that it is perhaps the most important contribution of Daniel to the theological thinking of Islam (168) although those passages that were most impactful for Christian thinking, such as Nebuchadnezzar's dream and the four world empires, did not factor in Islam. Another specific passage is found in Sura 85, which points either to the historical event of the martyrdom of the Christians of Najran in ca. 520 (169) or to the account in Daniel 3 about the three friends in the fiery furnace. Bobzin suggests that this passage *may* indicate that Daniel's story was known in early Islam (172). Although this is far from clear, later Islamic sources do contain various Daniel traditions. In addition, the 'actual' tomb of Daniel can be found in Susa.

Stefan Schorch, in "Die Auslegung des Danielbuches in der Schrift 'Die Quellen der Erlösung' des Don Isaak Abravanel (1437-1508)" (179-198), provides a thorough exposé of Abravanel's treatment of Daniel, which occupied a special place within his larger exegetical works, forming part of a separate 'messianic' trilogy. In this work Abravanel shows the great value he attached to Daniel's prophetic abilities and he refers to him as a prophet several times (186, 188). Abravanel's thoughts on Daniel's authorship and the switch between Hebrew and Aramaic, including his theory on the Hebrew language, are also treated (189). In dispute with Christian exegesis, Abravanel posits that the fifth kingdom mentioned in Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Daniel 2) and the visions (Daniel 7) concerns the messianic kingdom of the Jewish people in their land, Israel; the Church represents the fourth, or Roman Empire, in which he also includes the Ottoman Empire (191). Abravanel's treatment of Daniel culminates in his calculation of the year 1503 and/or 1531 as that of the advent of the Messiah after the Christian and Muslim kingdoms have destroyed each other in a future war. Much of his commentary is motivated by recent events in his life. Also of interest is that Abravanel, who prided himself on being of Davidic descent, felt great kinship with Daniel, the courtier at the foreign court and likewise of royal lineage (193-195).

Philip D.W. Krey investigates "Nicholas of Lyra's commentary on Daniel in the Literal Postill (1329)" (199-215). This Franciscan friar (1270-1349) from France is noted for his extensive Bible commentaries to which he applied the double literal sense, paying attention to what he perceived was the original meaning of the text and the (prophetic, Christological or Antichristological) relevance to his own time and end-times (200). Krey observes that, unlike the Jewish Daniel commentaries that look forward to a messianic deliverer and restoration of the Jewish people in their own land, and Christian writers who look forward to a fulfilment of the times in a return of Jesus, Nicholas was faced with a controversy within the Franciscan order, where a group called Spirituals had arisen that focused in particular on the rise of the Antichrist within the Church, especially the papacy, the identity and dates of whom they attempted to find in Scripture. Whereas Nicholas was also of the opinion that notably Daniel 11 points to the Antichrist, the bulk of his commentary is of a more Christocentric nature, with chapters 1-6 pointing to the first advent of Christ and chapters 7-12 referring to his return.

Stefan Strohm tackles "Luthers Vorrede zum Propheten Daniel in seiner Deutschen Bibel" (219-244). Aside from the two prefaces to his Daniel translation (1530 and 1541), Luther touches on Daniel in a number of other writings. The central themes are that the papacy is generally identified with the Antichrist, the onslaught of the Turks in Europe is connected with the evil forces that need to be defeated, giving rise to a number of anti-Islamic expressions and a separate tract. The prophets predicted the earthly Jesus to the Jews, whereas the latter part of Daniel

predicts his return to the Christian nations as well. Since Germany as heir to the Roman Empire forms the last kingdom of the four kingdom scheme, the Turks cannot be that empire and will therefore not succeed.

In “Die Danielprophetie als Reflexionsmodus revolutionärer Phantasien im Spätmittelalter” (245-268), Werner Röcke shows how the image of successive empires (*translatio imperii*) concluded by an eternal kingdom, as found in Daniel 2 and 7, gave rise in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries to the political fantasy of the ‘end of history’ and ‘a new millennial empire of God’s elect’ at which time the two images became increasingly pitted against each other (247). It would influence the historical thinking of the early Reformers, especially of opponents Martin Luther and the radical Thomas Müntzer. While Luther remained within the boundaries of Scripture, Müntzer propagated instead a spiritual and charismatic approach. His followers (the poor and oppressed), as God’s elect, would inherit the Kingdom of God whereas unbelievers, but also non-radicals like Luther were relegated to the masses and ‘scribes’ who would be left behind. In his Sermon to the Princes (an exposition of Daniel 2), Müntzer expounds the stone that destroys Nebuchadnezzar’s statue as Christ and he presents himself as a ‘new Daniel’, chosen by God to initiate the Kingdom of God (256). Luther, in contrast, opposed any form of human self-empowerment since all rulerships were granted by God. In passing, Röcke points to the dangers the radical interpretation of the dreams in Daniel had for later extremist political thinking, culminating in Nazism.

In his second paper, “Daniel in der Ikonografie des Reformationszeitalters” (269-292), Klaus Koch highlights the highly symbolic paintings in the town hall of Lüneburg (1531) as representative for the pictorial art illustrative for the written sources that have so far been treated. Of interest is the emphasis on the theological and political interpretation of Daniel; however, this is only part of wider biblical tableaux. One wonders though, as Daniel is not really the topic of this piece, even if some of the symbolism may be derived from it, whether a treatment of Daniel in the visual arts in this period and the following, with rich representations particularly in the Low Countries, would not have been more illuminating.

Heinz Scheible describes in “Melanchthons Verständnis des Danielbuchs” (293-322) how Melanchton, a close friend of Luther, produced a commentary to Daniel which was informed by the threat of the advancing Turkish forces into Europe. Despite Melanchton’s opinion that Daniel prophesied the rise of an Islamic Empire, culminating in the Ottoman Empire, the Turks do not form the Fifth Kingdom as he is convinced that they will not conquer Europe. Antiochus IV is a type for the Antichrist who is manifested in the papacy as well as in the Turks. In his end-time calculations he relies on the Carion Chronicle, which was in turn based on the obscure Wisdom of Elijah, the source of which was the talmudic principle of the duration of the world for 6000 years, followed by a 1000 year reign of the Messiah.

Barbara Pitkin investigates “Prophecy and history in Calvin’s lectures on Daniel (1561)” (323-321). Throughout his career, Calvin engaged Daniel on many occasions and on various levels. Firstly in his sermons, of which 47 on chs 5-12 were published in 1565 and secondly in a preface to the French translation of Melanchton’s 1543 commentary (published 1555). Pitkin limits herself to the lectures (1561) as they form Calvin’s most comprehensive treatment of Daniel. For Calvin, too, Daniel is a prophet and therefore he focuses more strongly on the prophetic-

historical aspects of the book. Unlike the ruling Protestant interpretative approach, Calvin remains well within Daniel's chronology (up to the Maccabees) and the immediate future would only pertain to Jesus' first ministry and not to final judgment and an eschatological Antichrist. In addition he rejects the fixation on calculating the end-time based on Daniel's numbers. Future predictions merely serve as consolation for the "ancient faithful" until the advent of Christ (337). Despite reading Daniel as past history, it is still relevant to the church in every age.

The final essay is Scott Mandelbrote's "Isaac Newton and the exegesis of the book of Daniel" (351-375). Newton's *Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse* (first published posthumously in 1733) were republished in 1922 by William Whitla, who had prophetic motives of his own. He read Newton's interpretation of Daniel's prophecy as being fulfilled in his own time, with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the beginning of the British Mandate in Palestine, coupled with his sympathies for the Zionist movement. In his own time, Newton's heterodox (Arian) leanings drove much of his Daniel interpretation. He disclaimed the doctrine of the Trinity as well as the divinity of Christ and placed many of the dates centuries beyond the traditionally accepted estimates. Ultimately, Newton was reluctant to publish his findings during his life time.

The book is relatively free of major typos, although two should be mentioned. On p. 332 'Revelations' should be 'Revelation' and on p. 335 we read "550 years from the reign of Christ to the advent of Christ", which should be "from the reign of Cyrus . . . etc." The volume contains a scriptural index, but no subject index or one for modern authors.