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The present volume is the first of a two-volume set dealing with current issues in the study of the book of Daniel, edited by John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint. The first volume provides the introduction to the entire project and includes articles largely revolving around the tradition history behind the stories and visions of Daniel and the social setting of the various parts of the book. Perhaps the most fruitful contribution of this volume as a whole is that it compels the reader to engage in some cross-disciplinary reflection on the question of the context of the book of Daniel, with regard to both its traditional background and social location.


In his introductory essay, Collins identifies several areas in which the current issues in the study of the book of Daniel can be located. The first is in the nature of the text. Here we encounter the discussion of the multiple versions in which the Daniel literature exists, from the Hebrew-Aramaic edition of the Masoretic Text, to the variants and additions to the Old Greek, and finally to the pseudo-Danielic literature found at Qumran. Second comes composition and genre. How do we understand the stories as traditional literature? Are the gaps in sequential logic in the visions the consequence of redaction or the dreamlike structure of myth? Are the visions midrashim, based upon interpretation of the earlier Hebrew scriptures, or reworked myth, based upon ancient Near Eastern sources? The third area of interest is in the social setting of the book. How do—or can—we relate the *maskilim* of Dan 11–12 to the *hasidim* of the Maccabean literature? How do we understand the setting of the stories in the courts of Mesopotamian monarchs? The fourth area involves the history of interpretation of the book, including not only its use in the New Testament with the controversial “Son of Man” but also the potential of subsequent interpretations to illuminate the original meaning of the text. Finally, we encounter the issues of theology and ethics. Theology must confront the thorny problem of the delay of the eschatological hope, while ethics approaches the book as a model for martyrdom. The essay is of importance not only as a roadmap to the two-
volume publication but also as a guide to how a major interpreter of Daniel understands the current state of the discussion.

In his essay, Knibb is concerned with the context of the figure of Daniel as reflected in the tales and visions, exploring the importance of innerbiblical exegesis in the visions as a form of manticism. He explores the Hebrew-Aramaic book in light of the larger corpus of Danielic literature and works of a similar nature, such as 1 Enoch, concluding that the comparison to the larger collection of Danielic literature emphasizes the skillful way in which the stories and visions in the biblical book have been integrated to form a whole, while the comparison to works of a similar nature makes it obvious that Daniel is *sui generis*.

Even more than the division into parts would indicate, the discussion in this volume tends to revolve around two foci—the traditional background of Daniel and the social context—with questions of literary structure (the overlapping distinctions between tales and visions on one hand and Hebrew and Aramaic on the other) of importance to both. Van der Toorn, Paul, and Walton approach the question of the relation of Daniel to Mesopotamian traditions through linguistic and traditional analysis. Van der Toorn traces the source of the stories dealing with the lions’ den to Mesopotamian metaphorical references to the society of royal advisors as a “den of lions.” Through linguistic study, Paul seeks to demonstrate the relation of phrases in Dan 1–6 to a Mesopotamian background, while Walton employs traditional analysis of Dan 7 in relation to *Enuma Elish*, the Anzu Myth, and the Baal and Anath Myth, concluding that no one version of the combat myth explains the whole of Dan 7. He concludes that the writer is drawing from multiple sources.

Kratz and LaCocque present alternatives to Walton’s approach. Kratz argues that Dan 7 is formed through exegesis of Dan 1–6 rather than use of ancient Near Eastern combat myths. In his analysis, Dan 1–6 and 7 are related to one another as “text and commentary.” LaCocque stresses Canaanite influence on the imagery of Dan 7. He tends to paint in broadly mythological strokes, filling in the blanks in the chapter with references to Canaanite and Mesopotamian mythology. At one level, the son of man
reflects Baal. At another, the figure is connected to the saints of the Most High. LaCocque interprets the phrase as “Son of Adam,” a new Adam, stressing the human (and historical) role in the process of liberation.

The discussion of social context tends to leave the traditional issues behind and concentrates instead on the setting in the Hellenistic world and the Hellenistic-era Judean community. Attention shifts from the tales of Dan 1–6 to the visions of the latter part of the book, and one of the key questions is the identification of the maskilim of Dan 11–12 and their relation to the hasidim of the Maccabean literature. Albertz’s approach to the issue turns upon a literary analysis of Daniel and its related literature. He resolves the problem by positing that the two terms designate the same group of teachers seen from within and without, some of whom entered into a coalition with the Maccabees. Albertz develops a complex scenario for the history of apocalyptic stretching back into the early Ptolemaic period. He treats the Old Greek version of the stories of Dan 4–6 as earlier than the Aramaic, dating possibly to the reign of Ptolemy II and reflecting a more optimistic attitude toward foreign rule. He takes Dan 2–7 as a preexisting apocalyptic unit, reading Dan 7 as a part of the collection of stories and injecting the origins of apocalyptic in Daniel earlier into the Hellenistic era. The Aramaic version, he says, turns more pessimistic, representing a call to resistance to the pretensions of foreign rulers by pious Jews during an earlier apocalyptic crisis in the late Ptolemaic period. The Hebrew Daniel incorporates the earlier Aramaic apocalypse (Dan 2–7) but changes its political agenda to a “purely individual eschatology.” It represents the work of the hasidim, understood as learned scribes rather than members of conventicles associated with the lower classes. Albertz argues for a split in the hasidim, seeing the author of Hebrew Daniel as belonging to a quietistic wing that rejected armed resistance and association with the Maccabees.

Beyerle and Davies reject the connection of Daniel to the hasidim of the Maccabean literature and explore instead the identity of the maskilim mentioned in Dan 11–12. Beyerle’s grounds for the rejection of a link to the hasidim are methodological. He takes a sociological and phenomenological approach, arguing that sociological
method is an important tool for the investigation of the apocalyptic movement but that we must begin with the texts, since the social groups behind them are no longer accessible. He investigates the relation between the belief system and the social system of Daniel with reference to the maskilim mentioned in the final chapters as an upper-class spiritual elite, persecuted by the Hellenistic reformers, who developed an otherworldly hope for salvation based upon mantic forms of revelation. Beyerle finds it difficult to identify that particular belief system in other ancient groups, leading to the conclusion that the maskilim may have died out as a movement. Davies makes a similar argument, insisting upon “the social dimension of authorship” rather than the national or individual. He describes the maskilim as a scribal elite involved in the tensions and ambivalence toward foreign rule inherent in the period of reform. An examination of the Qumran scrolls for a link to the maskilim proves inconclusive, leading to the suggestion that, while they may be part of the background of the scrolls, further progress will have to be made in the investigation of the social context of the scrolls before the discussion of Daniel and the maskilim can be further advanced.

In contrast to Beyerle and Davies, Grabbe approaches Daniel with the eyes of a historian. He offers an individual identification of the author of Daniel, based upon his reading of Dan 11, which he argues reflects a specialized knowledge of the history of the Hellenistic period that would have been available to few within the Jewish community itself. He suggests that such a person might have been Eupolemus, or someone like him, who may have originally sided with the Hellenistic reform but joined the resistance when Judaism was suppressed. He rightly rejects the notion that apocalypses could not come from the priestly segment of society.

Smith-Christopher represents a significant departure from the other studies in using “postcolonial criticism” to examine the narratives of Daniel. He notes archaeological studies that suggest a continuing devastation of the land for centuries following the Babylonian destruction and interprets the narratives not as a realistic depiction of Jewish elites involved in the administration of the empire but as a form of
resistance literature involving the dreams of the disenfranchised who sought to satirize the pretensions of monarchs to be godlike.

One must conclude from the discussion in this volume that Dan 7 remains pivotal to the interpretation of the book of Daniel; however, it is also interesting to note that the writers in this volume do not focus on the solution to the identity or interpretation of the “one like a son of man” but instead treat that issue as one among many to be solved in the interpretation of the book as a whole. Here, Albertz’s approach is the most daring, in placing the Greek version of the stories before the Aramaic and interpreting the stories with Dan 7 as evidence for an apocalyptic crisis at the end of the third century. He makes a strong argument for the literary unity of the Aramaic chapters and the parallel role of Dan 2 and 7 as “apocalyptic instructions”; however, the question is whether his solution to the historical issues raised by his literary construction of the book will be sufficiently convincing to other scholars in the subsequent discussion. One advantage of his historical construction is that it extends the exploration of apocalyptic in Daniel into the third century B.C.E., providing the opportunity to relate it to the current role of 1 Enoch in the discussion of the origins of apocalypticism—an issue that Albertz pays some attention to in his discussion of Dan 2–7 as an earlier apocalyptic writing.

A second conclusion that can be reached from this collection of studies is that Otto Plöger’s theocracy and eschatology typology seems to have been widely rejected, along with a deprivation theory of the origin of apocalyptic. While there is disagreement over the roles of the maskilim and the hasidim in Daniel, scholars dealing with the social setting of the book consistently identify the author as belonging to the scribal elite, possibly related in some way to the priestly class. While Albertz suggests that Aramaic may have been utilized to communicate to a poor but pious audience, he does not treat the author as belonging to that class. A different approach related in some degree to a deprivation theory of the origin of apocalyptic is Smith-Christopher’s use of postcolonial criticism to explain the portrayal of Daniel and his Jewish associates as mantic experts in the courts of alien kings in terms of a form of resistance literature involving the dreams of the disenfranchised designed to satirize royal pretensions. Smith-Christopher’s approach
necessarily opens the question of the extent to which we can use the social situation of the characters in the stories to reconstruct the social location of the author.

The tension between social contexts in Mesopotamia and in Judea emerges in this volume in the distinction between articles that deal with the tradition history behind the stories and visions and the articles that discuss the social milieu of the authors. While Davies seeks to explain the authors as returnees from the Mesopotamian Diaspora who are disenfranchised scribal elites not integrated into the priestly power structure of Jerusalem, and while LaCocque appeals to older Canaanite more so than Mesopotamian mythology as a background, there is a tendency to concentrate on Mesopotamia in the discussion of tradition history and on Judea in the Hellenistic era in the discussion of social context (a similar divergence appears in scholarship on 1 Enoch, where the figure of Enoch is frequently interpreted against a Mesopotamian background, but the narrative of the Watchers is read in relation to Hellenistic Judea). This dichotomy seems ripe for further examination.

Finally, no consensus appears to be in sight on the question of the relation of the maskilim of Daniel to the hasidim of the Maccabean literature. The different responses to the question of the book’s social location appear to be sensitive to the methods applied, leading to the conclusion that, short of an agreement upon appropriate method, what we should look for is a convergence in the results of different methods. What does emerge from the study is a series of intriguing proposals that might hold some promise in a methodologically eclectic approach to Daniel. Among these proposals may be included Albertz’s argument for Dan 2–7 as an apocalyptic literary unit; Beyerle’s and Davies’s focus on the upper-class, scribal, and possibly priestly location of the book; Grabbe’s identification of Eupolemus as a candidate for authorship; and Smith-Christopher’s use of archaeological data and postcolonial criticism to explore the issue of social location. Perhaps one justification for collections of essays of this nature is that they bring together methodologically diverse approaches, creating the potential for cross-fertilization.

The first volume of The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception proves to be a stimulating collection of essays reflecting the current state of the discussion of the book.
of Daniel by scholars in the forefront of Danielic studies, remarkable for the consistency in quality of the included articles. One comes away from the collection of essays as a whole with a sense of confirmation for Knibb’s judgment that Daniel is *sui generis*. Since many of the volume’s articles presuppose knowledge of Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic, its intended audience is the scholarly world of biblical studies and early Judaism. It is an important acquisition for libraries seeking to maintain a collection of works on current biblical scholarship.