Abstract

Whereas cosmogony has traditionally been seen as a topic dealt with primarily in wisdom literature, and eschatology, a field mostly focused upon in apocalyptic literature, the categorization of apocryphal and pseudepigraphic writings into sapiential, apocalyptic, and other genres has always been considered unsatisfactory. The reason is that most of the Pseudepigrapha share many elements of various genres and do not fit into only one genre.

The Book of Daniel, counted among the Writings of the Hebrew Bible and among the Prophets in the Septuagint as well as in the Christian Old Testament, is such an example. Does it deal with an aspect of Israel’s origin and history, a topic dealt mostly dealt with in sapiential thinking, or only with its future, a question foremost asked with an eschatological or apocalyptic point of view? The answer is that the author sees part of the secrets of Israel’s future already revealed in its past. It is, therefore, in the process of investigating Israel’s history that apocalyptic eschatology and wisdom theology meet.

This aspect is then stressed even more in the later reception history of the Book of Daniel as well as of writings ascribed to Daniel: if one wants to know something about Israel’s future in an ever-changing present situation, one needs to interpret the signs of the past. In this process, the interpretation of Israel’s place in political or world history, and the question of how the rise and fall of world powers have influenced and still influence Israel’s fate, often becomes a central focus of interest.
1. Introduction

The reception of the Book of Daniel and Danielic Literature in the Early Church is quite a relevant topic for the “Wisdom and Apocalypticism Section” of the Society of Biblical Literature, namely for these reasons: Daniel is a biblical book; Danielic literature is related to biblical literature; the Book of Daniel belongs to the Writings in the canon of the Hebrew Bible, of which an important part includes wisdom literature, whereas in the Septuagint’s Greek translation and the subsequent Christian canon the book is counted among the Prophetic books; and, finally, the book of Daniel is considered it to be an apocalyptic writing by modern scholarship.¹

Within this context one of the questions dealt with in this paper is: Does the book of Daniel deal with an aspect of Israel’s origin and history, a topic dealt mostly dealt with in sapiential thinking, and history or only with its future, a question foremost asked with an eschatological or apocalyptic point of view? The answer is that the author sees part of the secrets of Israel’s future already revealed in its past. It is, therefore, in the process of investigating Israel’s history that apocalyptic eschatology and wisdom theology meet.

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2. The Reception of Daniel by the Church Fathers

2.1. Irenaeus of Lyon

The first author of the Early Church who dealt with the Book of Daniel was Irenaeus of Lyon (ca. 130/140 - ca. 200 C.E.). In his most important work, written in Greek in the 80s of the second century C.E. and widely known under the title Adversus Haereses (Haer.), he clearly expresses his anti-gnostic views.² After a detailed interpretation of the

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paradise narrative in *Haer.* V:22-24 (Genesis 2 is explained with John 8:44),³ in *Haer.* V:24:1 he concludes his salvation-historical line of thought by saying: “Like he [i.e. the devil] has lied in the beginning he also has done so at the end by falsely stating: ‘This all has been given to me, and I will give it to those, whom I choose to give it to (Luke 4:6).’”⁴

Irenaeus then elaborates that the worldly power and the dominion of kings can only lie in the hand of God, after which in *Haer.* V:24:2-3 there follows an excursus on earthly power: it is not a tool of the devil, but has been created by God as a “means to limit evil.”⁵ Against the background of this example of salvation history there seems to lie apocalyptic thinking, according to which the good and evil powers have dominated mankind since the days of creation.

Following this, he deals with the *topoi* “Antichrist” and “1000-year Reign.” As it was prophesied at the beginning of the world (Gen 3:15) and is indicated in the narrative about the temptation of Jesus (Matt 4:1-11), at the end of days Christ will besiege the great Seducer and finally destroy him. This then becomes the main theme in *Haer.* V:25:1-30:4. He begins to discuss the theme of the “Antichrist” in detail, which until then had been only briefly touched, in *Haer.* V:25ff.⁶ In this section he mostly refers to the key passages of Daniel 2, Daniel 7-9, Matthew 24, 2 Thessalonians 2, and Revelation 13 and 17.

Whereas the expression “Antichrist” is Christian, the image of an anti-divine ruler is much older and is already found in the Hebrew Bible and in the Jewish apocalypses of the Second Temple Period.⁷ Besides Daniel 7 and 9:11, *Assumption of Moses* 8; 4 Ezra 11-12, and 2 *Baruch* 39, one should think of 1 John 2:18,22 and 4:3; 2 John 7; 2

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⁴ See further Overbeck, *Menschwerdung,* 368.
⁵ See also e.g. Sap 6:1-11; Rom 13:1ff. and bAZ 3b-4a.
Thessalonians 2:3-12; John 5:43; Revelation 13 and 17; Baruch 4,1-5; Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah 4; Sibylline Oracles VIII:88f and 139-159; as well as Justin’s Dialogue with Trypho 31:2-32:4 and 110:2.

From these passages one can conclude that the image of an anti-divine ruler in the second century C.E. is still quite diverse and certainly not unified. This antichrist figure could either be identified with a political figure (Antiochus IV Epiphanes in Dan 7-9 and 11, the last Roman emperor in 4 Ezra 11-12, Nero Redivivus in Revelation 13 and Ascension of Isaiah 4)8 – or be associated with expressions like “Son of destruction,” “Satan,” and “Antichrist,” as well as “false Prophet” and “Pseudo-Anointed.”9

Irenaeus, therefore, stands at the beginning of the development of a more and more consistent “Antichrist theology”10 - in which a cosmic battle between the Antichrist and the Messiah/Christ is seen behind the struggle between Israel/the Church and the world powers, starting already at the time of creation - , and gives a detailed account of the expected sequence of events during the coming of the Antichrist in Haer. V:25:1.11

2.2. Hippolytus of Rome

Hippolytus of Rome (first half of the third century C.E. [?]; about whose life little is known), who according to Eusebius was a bishop, possibly in Palestine or surrounding area, was “a churchman who disdained profane science in order to cultivate the Scriptures. His works are essentially commentaries on sacred texts and nearly always on the OT, interpreted by a typological exegesis, which he applies to Christ and the church,” thus according to Pierre Nautin.12

His Commentarium in Danielem preserved in Greek13 – one of the first Christian Bible commentaries – is of great importance for our topic.14 A work that is also relevant is the

8 Also see Jenks, Origins, 175ff; 199ff and 274ff.
10 For the advancement of the anti-Christ legend in the early-church apocalypses, see the literature specified above.
11 Reinhard Bodenmann, Naissance d’une Exégèse: Daniel dans l’Église ancienne des trois premiers siècles (BGBE 28; Tübingen: Mohr, 1986), 263, quoted in Overbeck, Menschwerdung, 400.
13 For a distinction between the works written by Hippolytus and those attributed to him, see Nautin, Hippolytus, 383-384.
older treatise “De Antichristo,”15 a florilegium of apocalyptic passages from the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. Hippolytus expects the Antichrist (chs. 6; 49), who will rebuild Jerusalem (ch. 6), but will be subordinated to the power of Rome, the “new Babylon” (chs. 30-36). The Antichrist will seduce mankind (chs. 54-58) and persecute the church (chs. 59-63). At the end of days, John and Elijah (ch. 64; see also chs. 44ff.) and, afterwards, Christ himself (ch. 64) will come. Christ will execute the judgement, after which the righteous will inherit paradise, and the wicked ones will be punished in hell (ch. 65).16

In Hippolytus’ Commentary on Daniel, book IV is particularly important, as it offers an interpretation of Daniel’s vision of the four animals (Daniel 7) and refers it to 1) the empire of the Medes, Assyrians, and Babylonians, 2) the empire of the Persians, 3) the empire of the Macedonians, Hellenes, or Greeks (IV:3-4), and 4) “the presently ruling” empire of the Romans (IV:5): “However, the now ruling animal is not one nation, but it is a collection of all languages and generations of mankind and is prepared to be a multitude of warriors, who are all called Romans, but do not originate from one country” (IV:8).17

At the end of the four empires according to Dan 7:17-18 the heavenly reign will start (IV:10). Christ is the firstborn, the Son of God, to whom everything on earth and in heaven has been subordinated, the firstborn “before the angels” and the first born “from the dead” (IV,11).18

Hippolytus answers the question of when “the Seducer”19 will come and on which day the “Parousia” of the Lord will be (IV:16), with a peculiar calculation. The age of the world has been set at 6000 years, and as Christ was born 5500 years after the creation, the end of days will take place 500 years after that (IV:23). The calculation of the age of the world is found (as can be found in earlier interpretations) on the basis of verses like Gen 2:3; Ps 90:4 (= LXX Ps 89:4), and 2 Peter 3:8. Afterwards Hippolytus in IV:35 interprets Dan 9:25-27 as referring to the second coming of Christ and the time of the resurrection of the dead as follows:

After the 62 weeks have passed and Christ has returned, and the Gospel has been preached everywhere in this world and the time has passed, there is one week left, in which Elijah and Enoch will come, and in their midst appears the abomination of the Antichrist, who will announce destruction to the world. Afterwards he will abolish the sacrifice (Dan 9:27), which has been sacrificed at every place and by every nation to God. Then in IV:49f, Hippolytus gives an even more vivid description of the Antichrist, about which “all scriptures, both the Prophets” speak, “as well as the Lord has given

15 Achelis, *Schriften*, GCS 1,2, 1-47.
17 Text and translation after Bonwetsch, *Hippolytus* (GCS 1,1), 205.
18 For the pre-existence of Messiahs in Judaism, see 4 Ezra 7:26-30; 12:32; 12:26; 1 Enoch (Etiopic Apocalypse) 46:1-2; 48:3; 62:7; 2 Baruch (Syriac Apocalypse) 30:1 and bPes 54a.
19 According to *De Antichristo* 25, the antichrist is a Jew from the tribe of Dan; so also in Irenaeus’ *Haer.* V, 30,2; see further Schreckenberg, *Adversus-Judaeos-Texte*, 1, 227f.
testimony of, and the Apostles taught about, [and] his name was secretly revealed by John in the Book of Revelation.”

The text of Dan 9:26-27, which in earlier times had been linked to Antiochus IV Epiphanes, Hippolytus now applies to the Antichrist and makes him – in connection with the Synoptic Apocalypse (Mc 13 par.) and the Revelation of John – the basis of his detailed description of the end of days (cf. IV:5ff).

In summary we can say that Hippolytus expected the coming of the Antichrist, who would rebuild Jerusalem; the coming of Elijah and Enoch; and the return of Christ, who would capture the Antichrist, after which there would follow the resurrection and the final judgement. Hippolytus bases his interpretation on Genesis 1 (the six days of creation) and Revelation 20 (the capture of Satan and the 1000-year reign), which he, with the help of Ps 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8, joins to an all-embracing view of history.

2.3. Origen

Origen (ca. 185 - 253/4 C.E.) was born in Alexandria, worked in Caesarea, was one of the “most important Greek Church Fathers” and at the same time is “without doubt the most controversial figure in the development of early Christian eschatology.” He was a student of the Neoplatonic Ammonius Saccas and possibly of Clement of Alexandria and was well versed in Jewish Bible interpretations. He is the author/editor of the so-called Hexapla, the Bible edition in Hebrew, Hebrew in Greek transcript, as well as in the

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20 Text and translation after Bonwetsch, Hippolytus (GCS 1,1), 278-281.
21 On the coming of Elijah and Enoch see Comm. in Dan. IV,35ff.
24 Schreckenberg, Adversus-Judaeos-Texte, 1, 228; See further 228ff and Lietzmann, Geschichte, II, 305ff.
25 Daley, Hope, 47; See also 47ff and Frick, Geschichte, 95-104.
26 For Clement of Alexandria, who is not treated here, see Daley, Hope, 44-47 and Frick, Geschichte, 82-95.
In his Commentary on Matthew, Commentarium in Evangelium Matthaei XXXII-LIX, Origen deals with the Synoptic Apocalypse (according to Matt 24:3-44). In it he treats the following thematic topics: The “announcement of the destruction of the Temple” (chs. 29-31), the “beginning of the time of distress” (chs. 32-39), the “culmination of the time of distress” (chs. 40-47), the “Coming of the Son of Man” (chs. 48-52), and the “warnings for the end of days” (chs. 53-59). Here it will be of interest to refer to his interpretation of Dan 9:24-27 (about the seventy weeks and the “abomination”), in which he explains the characteristics of Christian Bible interpretation and refers, for example, to the destruction of Jerusalem: Only those inspired by the Holy Spirit can truly understand Scripture, especially the Book of Daniel, and they will recognize that the Prophet has foresaid that the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem will last until the end of days, i.e. the fulfillment of the world.

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2.4. Eusebius of Caesarea

Eusebius (ca. 265-340 C.E.) was since 313 Bishop of Caesarea and was influenced by Origen, whose library he inherited, as well as by one of Origen’s students, whose name (Pamphilus) he adopted.31 The diligently historical and exegetical Eusebius became mainly known through his Historia ecclesiastica.32

From his writing Life of Constantine,33 a panegyric on the first “Christian” emperor Constantine in four books, whom he compares favourably with Cyrus, Alexander, and Moses, the final passage is worth citing here (Vit. Const. LXXV):

He alone of all the Roman emperors has honoured God the All-sovereign with exceeding godly piety; he alone has publicly proclaimed to all the word of Christ; he alone has honoured his Church as no other since time began; he alone has destroyed all polytheistic error, and exposed every kind of idolatry… (182).34

Podskalsky describes and evaluates Eusebius’ eschatological interpretation of the central passages of Daniel 2 and 7 in reference to the Roman Empire as follows and compares it with that of Origen:

[ ...] so sieht Origenes in ihr den ersehnten Anbruch eines weltweiten Friedens in einem geeinten Reich, durch den erst die Erfüllung der christlichen Mission ermöglicht wird. Und er erweckt den Anschein, als ob diese providentielle Aufgabe des Römischen Reiches andauerte. Damit ist eine neue Epoche in der Geschichte der Danielelexegese angebrochen: ohne die wenig schmeichelhaften Attribute des letzten Weltreichs zu leugnen oder umzudeuten, werden sie durch anderorts entlehene, unabhängig motivierte Ergänzungen in ihrem Aussagegehalt suspendiert. Den vorläufigen Höhepunkt erreicht diese Wende mit Eusebios von

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Kaisareia. Er übernimmt zunächst die vorsichtige Deutung des Origenes, versucht aber daneben, in einer für ihn bezeichnenden Weise, mit paränetisch-typologischen Begründungen, die beiden Danielvisionen zu harmonisieren’ [...]. Beide Autoren heben die Stärke, versinnbildet durch das Eisen, als wesentliches Merkmal des vierten Reiches hervor; Eusebios jedoch mit eindeutig positiver Akzentsetzung. Ähnlich wie bei Origenes, zeigt sich auch bei ihm das eigentlich Neue in seiner unabhängig vom Buch Daniel formulierten Meinung über das römische Reich, dessen entscheidende Zäsur von Kaiser Augustus auf Konstantin den Großen verschoben wird. Eusebios scheut sich nicht, den Vers Die Heiligen des Höchsten werden das Reich empfangen’ (Daniel 7,18) in seiner Tricennatsrede auf den Herrschaftsantritt Konstantins zu beziehen. Denn zusätzlich zu der durch die Geburt der Monarchie erreichten, friedlichen Einheit des Reiches kam mit Kaiser Konstantin auch das Licht der Frömmigkeit [...] und der Verfall der Gottlosigkeit [...] zum Durchbruch. Damit ist zwar nicht in Worten, aber in der Sache das römische Reich mit dem Reich Christi verschmolzen.35

2.5. Jerome

Jerome was born in 347 C.E. in Dalmatia, studied in Rome, and lived from 386 to his death in 419 C.E. in Bethlehem.36 He revised the various Latin translations of the New Testament, and this translation, known as the Vulgate, contains all of the books of the New Testament as we know it today in the West.37

Jerome’s eschatology is intrinsically connected with his knowledge of the Bible, his former admiration of Origen, his other personal contacts, and the many events in his long and ascetic life as a scholar.38 In the context of his spiritual-personal, allegorical exegesis, he would interpret the apocalyptic future expectations mostly as a confrontation of the individual with death.39 However, later in his life he would also take the apocalyptic tradition increasingly literally:

So his Commentary on Daniel (written in 399, to refute Porphyry’s historicizing explanation of that book) interprets the Antichrist as a human figure, a Jew of humble origin, who will soon overthrow the Roman Empire and rule the world (2.7.7f; 2.7.11; 4.11.21).40

35 Podskalsky, Reichseschatologie (see footnote 22), 11-12.
Also, his commentaries on Isaiah, written between 408 and 410 C.E. (Comm. Isa. VI:14.1; XIV:51.6; XVI:59.14; XVIII:65.17f), and Ezekiel, written after 411 C.E. (Comm. Ezech. XI,36.38), express his latter day expectations, which may have been influenced by the attack of the Barbarians at the beginning of the fifth century C.E.: The Roman Empire will soon fall, the Antichrist is near, and the appearance of heretics within the Church is a sign of the coming end.  

Finally in his commentary on Daniel (Explanatio in Danielem) it becomes obvious that he does not look upon the biblical books from a historical distance, as is the case with Neoplatonic Porphyry, but the Book of Daniel is for the time in which Jerome lived, still very relevant, as is stressed by Podskalsky:

Gegen die rein historisch-kritische Deutung des Porphyrios betont er leidenschaftlich die eschatologische Zielrichtung des Buches Daniel als exegetisches Prinzip: den Verweis auf zukünftiges Geschehen sieht er schon im Wort εἰκὼν (Daniel 2,31) allegorisch ausgedrückt; seinem Gegner wirft er vor, nicht nur Authentizität und Inspiration des Buches Daniel als einer prophetischen Schrift zu leugnen, sondern auch, sich mit seiner Vorentscheidung, alle Gesichte nur auf Vergangenes zu deuten und damit das römische Reich nicht zu berücksichtigen, in unlösbare Widersprüche zu verwirkeln bezüglich des fünften, ewigen Reiches. Er selbst dagegen legt - unter gleichzeitiger Zurückweisung des Chiliasmus - die für den Okzident klassisch gewordene Abfolge der Weltreiche so fest: dem Reiche der Babylonier folge das der Mede und Perser, das auch die Babylonier einschließe, das makedonische Reich Alexanders und seine Nachfolgestaaten und endlich das römische Reich. Bei letzterem hebt er besonders die Schwächung durch die Barbareneinfälle seiner Zeit hervor. [...] Beachtung verdient jedoch die skeptische Haltung zum römischen Reiche, dem er - ohne zeitliche Festlegung -- ein baldiges (?) Ende voraussagt.

When the western Goths attacked Rome in the year 408, Jerome thought this to be a sign of the end of days, but after the city had been taken and the end did not come, he softened this acute expectation of the end.

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41 Text: PL 24 and 25.
43 Podskalsky, Reichseschatologie, 13; See also Daley, Hope, 101.
2.7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has offered a few examples to illuminate the reception history of the Book of Daniel in the Early Church, and specifically has asked whether the analysis of a political situation from a faith perspective is an interpretation of a past, present, or future situation. Coming back to this question, we can now state that also the Church Fathers reflected upon the future of the Church within the context of the Roman Empire by investigating Israel’s origin by studying its Scriptures, especially the Book of Genesis and the Book of Daniel.

In this process the Church Fathers understood the struggle between the Church and the Roman Empire as a cosmic battle between the Antichrist and Christ, in much the same way as the author of the Book of Revelation - or going back even further in history - , in the same manner as the authors of the books of Genesis and Daniel had described before, a description which they, the Church Fathers, could now fully understand through the Holy Spirit.

The main elements of apocalyptic thinking are thus found in the influence on mankind of good and evil or personified of that of the Antichrist and Messiah/Christ since the creation, as well as the calculation of the exact time of the end of days. Examples of eschatology are especially found in the scheme of salvation history and the apocalyptic survey of history by using Daniel’s scheme of the seventy weeks, whereas cosmogonic and sapiential motives are mostly connected with the creation narrative. For the Church Fathers, however, these genres were mere means to interpret the past in order to know more about the future.

We can furthermore make the important observation that in the period from the second to the fifth century C.E. there is a shift away from focusing on the Antichrist and the Fourth Empire of the Book of Daniel as represented by the Roman Empire to a more friendly approach to the Roman Empire, which at the end of the fourth century – i.e. after Constantine the Great and the success of the Christian mission – could be understood in a Christian way, now endangered by evil powers from outside (the Barbarian invasion), or, as an alternative, was seen as the Fifth Empire replacing the four previous ones.

In all of this the Church Fathers didn’t care much, whether their political interpretation was typical cosmogonic, sapiential, eschatological, or apocalyptic exegesis, although they knew the many rhetorical advantages of these and other genres, as they were able to use and adapt them for their own specific purposes.