



Benjamin D. Suchard

Aramaic Daniel: A Textual Reconstruction of Chapters 1-7

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Benjamin Suchard's monograph on the textual history of Daniel developed out of his interest in the grammar of Biblical Aramaic itself. As Suchard acknowledges (1), the book of Daniel constitutes the majority of extant Aramaic material in the Bible and is therefore of particular value for any linguistic work on Biblical Aramaic. Nevertheless, given the general scholarly consensus about the gradual textual development of the book, the philological or historical value of any given Aramaic passage of Daniel depends upon the relative dating assigned to it. It is these potential implications that form the guiding motivation for Suchard's study of Daniel's textual history. His principal goal is to create an evidence-based reconstruction of "the most original version of Dan 1-7" (5) and to explain the secondary elements of the text. The problems with reconstructing an *Urtext* are here dismissed in favor of the valuable insights that such an endeavor might reveal (10).

The volume focuses on Dan 1-7, and Suchard defends this selection by suggesting that chapters 8-12 probably date from a comparatively later period, and thus their textual history is not complex enough to warrant detailed discussion (5). Textual comments on the Hebrew visions of Daniel are thus only briefly included when the discussion of other Danielic chapters seem to warrant it (e.g., 83). However, the fact that Suchard's study ends with broader conclusions about the composition of the whole book (110-16) suggests that the reader may have benefited from separate explanatory sections on the textual development of these later chapters, too, beyond the isolated examples provided. Despite its extant Hebrew form, Dan 1-2:4a does receive detailed study within Suchard's volume due

to his defense of an Aramaic original for this section (20–21). This is a fair justification for inclusion, but given that Suchard seemingly thinks Dan 8–12 also results from translation into Hebrew (116), this rationale for the textual scope of the volume could have been articulated with more precision.

In the introduction, Suchard outlines the two-step methodology for his textual study. This is informed by the distinction, drawn from historical linguistics, between comparative reconstruction (or, the attempt to recover a text's supposed archetype by reconstructing a form that accounts for all textual variants) and internal reconstruction (or, the attempt to account for contradictions or similar issues that remain within this archetype). Suchard deliberately chooses this methodology to replace biblical scholarship's traditional distinction between textual criticism (*Textkritik*) and literary criticism (*Literarkritik*), and this appears to be a productive way to think about the Bible's textual formation.

This methodological approach forms the main structuring feature within the monograph's seven central chapters that tackle Dan 1–7 in succession. The first section of each chapter sees the biblical text initially undergo comparative reconstruction through the collection and evaluation of attested variants in the major textual witnesses, including the Qumran fragments, the MT, the Old Greek, Theodotion, Vulgate, and Peshitta (the latter two being relied upon only rarely in the textual reconstruction). In an attempt to make this step succinct, the book leaves much of this work undescribed and restricts attention to situations where a non-MT should be preferred to a MT variant (most often these preferred non-MT variants are drawn from 4QDan^a). This decision to adhere mainly to the MT is explained as simply reflecting the pervasive use of this particular tradition and not a judgment on the MT's overall superiority (11). Nevertheless, it still, perhaps unhelpfully, centers the MT as the tradition from which others depart. After carrying out this stage, a reconstructed archetype for the relevant portion of Aramaic Daniel is presented. The remaining textual difficulties in this recreated archetype are then explained through internal reconstruction. This relies upon the recognition of specific scribal errors, editorial processes, or literary reworking that may have caused the resulting form of the text. The textual outcome of this stage, labeled as the reconstructed text of the Danielic chapter, is presented with all secondary elements identified. Finally, Suchard ends each chapter by offering conclusions about his findings and suggesting their wider implications for understanding the book of Daniel as a whole.

In the course of the study, the volume makes numerous insightful judgments on difficulties or tensions within the biblical text. For example, the decision that Dan 1:5a α is an interpolation and should be left out of the internal reconstruction convincingly shows that the dietary story elements of Dan 1 need not be characterized as secondary in nature (18–19). Throughout the discussion of each chapter, the proposed textual reconstruction is often reliant on previous scholarship as a foundation, but the book does not simply adopt existing scholarly judgments on text-critical issues. Instead, it consistently relies on substantial evidence from the text itself to make its own reconstructive judgments (e.g., 49). However, despite the rigor and precision, there is an inherent subjectivity to

such decisions, and this is intermittently acknowledged by how the book's conclusions are presented with a degree of hesitancy (e.g., 56). Inevitably, in a volume with such large aims, the explanation for every specific textual issue is not always fully clarified or argued. For example, the similarities between Nebuchadnezzar's letter (Dan 3:31–33) and Darius's letter (Dan 6:26–28) are suggested as evidence they were both secondarily added to bookend Dan 4–6 when these chapters circulated as a smaller collection (66 and 91). While this proposition is quite plausible, other forms of scribal or editorial activity (e.g., transposition) may also have resulted in this epistolary material's current location, and it would have been prudent to also consider these possibilities here. Yet it is hard to lament these minor oversights when Suchard covers so much specific textual detail throughout the volume.

Once the efforts at reconstructing each individual text of Dan 1–7 have been exhausted, the final chapter offers some concluding insights about the formation of the whole book. The general outline of Daniel's textual development follows a series of stages that have been widely identified before: beginning with a range of independent Danielic compositions; then the collection of Dan 4–6; the formation of Dan 1–6 as a compilation of court tales; the addition of Dan 7; and, finally, the appending of Dan 8–12. Suchard augments this by suggesting that Dan 2 was added to Dan 4–6 first, due to their thematic coherence with the four-kingdoms motif, and this was followed by Dan 2, then Dan 1. Although outside the volume's explicit scope, Suchard also suggests that the authors of Dan 8–12 were significant in the book's development, as they each left their own editorial mark on the collection once their apocalypse was added (e.g., the author of Dan 10–12 is held responsible for adding new material to Dan 2:43; see 113). This is never presented with undue certainty, though, and in some places Suchard is careful to express doubt about the origin of interpolations that do not match defined textual layers (114). The volume ends with a lengthy appendix (covering more pages than all the other preceding chapters combined) that provides different reconstructed stages of Daniel's text throughout its development. While it may seem intimidating, this is the culmination of the whole volume and the point where Suchard clearly lays out how he envisages the contents of the biblical text at various points in its growth. Scholarship on the textual development of Daniel has been in need of such a well-presented and informative outline. The book's appendix alone will no doubt be particularly influential for future scholarship on this topic.

In sum, the book's judicious treatment of the biblical material offers readers a meticulous explanation for the apparent textual difficulties and intricacies that may be encountered when reading Dan 1–7. This rich volume will undoubtedly be crucial for all future textual investigation on the book of Daniel and its prehistory.