Igor’ Bessonov’s book *The Book of Daniel’s Prophesies: Origins, History of Interpretation, and Exegesis* published in Russian in St. Petersburg’s publishing house “Aletheia,” represents one of the first attempts in contemporary Russian biblical scholarship to treat the Book of Daniel in its full historical and interpretive complexity through a broad variety of ancient and modern scholarly sources. The monograph signals the emerging interest in Jewish apocalypticism from various Eastern European scholarly communities, which is significant for facilitating an exploration not only of biblical Jewish apocalypses, such as the Book of Daniel, but also their extra-biblical counterparts, such as 2 Enoch, the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, and the *Ladder of Jacob* – Jewish apocalyptic works preserved uniquely in the Slavic literary environment.

The book offers an in-depth study of Dan 2, 4, 7–9 and 11–12 – sections which contain a crucial panoply of Jewish prophetic and visionary traditions. The main part of the monograph consists of six sections in which Bessonov analyzes Nebuchadnezzar’s dreams about a great statue and a stone in Dan. 2, the vision of four beasts in Dan. 7, Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the world tree in Dan. 4, the vision the ram and the goat in Dan. 8, the prophecy of seventy weeks in Dan. 9, and the vision of the end times in Dan. 11–12. The monograph closely examines the possible origins of these apocalyptic traditions, their putative historical context, and the history of their interpretation in Jewish and Christian materials. It also explores the possible connections of Danielic stories with the Jewish pseudepigrapha. Bessonov provides a theological interpretation of Daniel’s prophecies and their interpretation in light of ancient, medieval, and contemporary historical events, including Israel’s modern history. The study pays special attention to preterist, historicist, and futurist interpretations of the Danielic traditions.

The monograph operates with a complex and multidimensional methodology which combines historical-critical, philological, and theological
approaches. Bessonov believes that a synergistic methodology can help to bridge the gap between “academic” and “ecclesiastical” readings of Daniel. His intention is to treat Daniel both as a literary monument and as an inspired work. It is a difficult task, laden with the possibility that it will gather harsh criticism from both parties, “academic” as well as “ecclesiastical.” Bessonov argues that the pseudepigraphic character of the work does not contradict the book’s “inspiratory nature” since the background of some pseudepigraphical works, in his opinion, is rooted in the real, mystical experience of their authors.

One of the main methodological instruments of Bessonov’s theological approach is sensus plenior, a concept which became popular among Catholic exegetes in the last century. Bessonov speaks in detail about the history of the concept, discussing its advantages and weaknesses. He understands sensus plenior as a deeper meaning of the text, which is included in God's intention, but veiled in its revelation and not expressed clearly by its human transmitters. According to this perspective, God could instill a meaning into a biblical text which its human authors could not fully grasp, but which can be clarified later. A similar understanding is present in Jewish pesherim, where the eschatological situation reveals a meaning that is hidden until the last days. Sensus plenior thus differentiates between the meaning accentuated by a human author/compiler of the work, and the meaning imparted by God, which is revealed only with the passage of time.

Bessonov gives appropriate attention to questions surrounding the authorship and dating of Daniel. He argues that the initial stories about Daniel were composed in 4th century BCE, which possibly included stories from chapters 4–6. He then traces the composition of the Aramaic portion of the book (Dan 1–7) to 3rd century BCE. This represented in his opinion a reaction to Hellenization and Hellenistic monarchies. Chapters 8–12 were written during the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes and at that time, the first chapter was also translated into Hebrew. Bessonov’s conclusions follow the previous hypotheses of Jürgen-Christian Lebram and Rainer Albertz.

One of the great values of the monograph, especially for Russian scholarly and lay audiences, is that it offers for the first time in Russian language, a detailed discussion of the various aspects of the Book of Daniel and its apocalyptic traditions through the broad panoply of modern Western biblical studies and scholars, ranging from the major representatives of the History of Religions School (Hermann Gunkel, Sigmund Mowinckel) to contemporary North American and European experts on Jewish apocalypticism (John J. Collins and others). The bibliography contains several hundred scholarly titles in English, French, German, Hebrew, Russian, and Bulgarian. Such an impressive panorama of previous studies forms an important context for
extensive and nuanced discussions on the Book of Daniel and its apocalyptic traditions.

The book does not merely summarize previous scholarship. Bessonov offers his own original insights into the text’s perennial questions. His original contributions occur in many sections of the book, including a section dealing with Dan 7. Although enormous amounts of ink have been spilled clarifying the enigmatic traditions in Dan 7, Bessonov’s study accentuates some promising new avenues. One of his hypotheses is the connection of Dan 7 with the Enochic writings. Although previous scholarship has mostly concentrated on the links between Dan 7 and the Book of Parables, Bessonov, following Loren Stuckenbruck’s insights, draws attention to the connection between Daniel 7 and the Book of Giants. One of the motifs that links these two texts is a theme of the divine judgment given to a seer in a dream. He points out that the Book of Giants describes the dream of two giants, Hahyah and Ohayah, predicting a future divine judgment that will punish the giants for their crimes. He notices that the connections between the book of Daniel, the Book of Giants, and other writings of the Enochian cycle is rather complex. They most likely suggest a general literary borrowing from an earlier source. Yet, in his opinion, this points to an indirect connection between the book of Daniel and Enochic Judaism.

In sum, Bessonov’s monograph has a lasting methodological value not only for the study of the Book of Daniel, but also for investigations of other apocalyptic texts and traditions, which, like 2 Enoch, the Apocalypse of Abraham, and the Ladder of Jacob have been uniquely preserved by the Slavia Orthodoxa. The methodological significance of the book lies in the experimental and heuristic nature of its author’s approach. He does not confine himself to a single theoretical solution but, instead incorporates a variety of interpretive methods.

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