THE SCRIBAL SCHOOL OF DANIEL

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I. DANIEL AND THE SOCIAL-SCIENCE AGENDA

The integration of social-science methods into biblical scholarship is a fairly recent phenomenon, and hence the agenda of this essay does not carry a long history. Interest in the identity of the author of a biblical book as an individual is of course extremely ancient (to the point of pseudepigraphical attribution, be it of the Gospels or Epistles), but until the last two decades scholarship has tended to draw such a profile from a surface reading of the text, while the motivation for authorship itself has been addressed in theological terms: “what was the ‘message’ to be conveyed?” More recently, the problems of relating texts to real rather than implied authors, and a recognition of the many levels of “meaning” (and ambiguity) accessible from a text have made “authorship” a more recalcitrant issue. We have learnt, moreover, to distrust what authors tell us, until we know why they are writing and whom they wish to persuade of what. Applying this “hermeneutics of suspicion” to scriptural texts understandably meets with little interest in some quarters. But recent work has demonstrated the value of this approach for uncovering the underlying, as well as the overt, ideology of texts.

The various reasons for the advent of social-science perspectives on biblical literature deserve a lengthy review elsewhere. The outcome, however, is that the social dimension of authorship is now more fully in view. This is both in terms of the social construction of an author’s world-view—the cultural formation, the class interest, the group ideology—and the function of writing, whether generally or in particular, as manifestations of economic and ideological impulses rather than personal inclination or impulse, or even theological reflection. One consequence for Hebrew Bible studies is that its writings are no longer simply treated either as the product of “ancient Israel,” as a whole, expressing the beliefs of an entire society, nor as the fruit of an individual and autonomous mind. Nor is such writing explained simply in terms of the communication of a message, but in terms of various other functions also, such as
entertainment, ideological construction, group identity reinforcement (and several other motivations). In short, the origins of the literature of the Jewish scriptural canon are increasingly approached from social-scientific presuppositions about the nature of human behaviour, of which writing is but one category. Fundamentally, the shift from a humanistic to a sociological approach is also a move from the idealistic to the materialistic. This is, indeed, a major transition within the discipline of biblical studies, the wider contours of which should not be obscured.

The history of research into the authorship of Daniel reflects a trend from personal and historical, via theological and literary and back, to socio-historical emphases. A century ago, the question of the book's authorship and historicity were intertwined, and the notion that Daniel himself was not the author—and that the author was historically inaccurate—was once raised as a question of "fraud." This battle was still being fought by H. H. Rowley, who very sharply insisted on a single second-century setting for the entire contents and elaborated greatly on its historical inaccuracies.¹ Rowley himself accordingly played a major role in promoting the question of the "origin" of "apocalyptic" as a product of persecution, and contributing to the revival of this genre in theological discussion, including its dependence on either "prophecy" or "wisdom." More recently still, "apocalypse" has been identified as a literary genre, or set of genres; and the question of historical background has correspondingly re-emerged in various searches for an "apocalyptic movement"² or "apocalyptic communities."³ While these terms are a


² Although this term has now generally been abandoned, it continues in the so-called "Groningen hypothesis" of the the Dead Sea Scrolls, where this "apocalyptic movement" is the forerunner of the Essenes. See F. García Martínez, "Qumran Origins and Early History: A Groningen Hypothesis," Folia Orientalia 25 (1988) 113–36.