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Aramaic Daniel Apocryphon (4Q246): Its Interpretative Challenges Reconsidered

Aramejski Danielov apokrif (4Q246):

ponovni razmislek o njegovih interpretativnih izzivih

Abstract. The Aramaic Daniel Apocryphon (4Q246) is among the most discussed Aramaic texts from Qumran, primarily due to its mention of a figure called the “Son of God” (ברה די אל) and the “Son of the Most High” (בר עליון). The fragmentary state of the scroll and its syntactic ambiguity have generated divergent interpretations, with some seeing the figure as a blasphemous foreign king and others as a positive, eschatological savior. This study re-examines 4Q246 through a fresh philological and structural analysis. It contains the edition, translation, and detailed linguistic commentary of the text, together with a new proposal for dividing the work according to the alternation of positive and negative parts (A1–B1, A2–B2, A3–B3), which clarifies the internal structure of the text. Although the text changes the period it describes three times, the logical referents of the descriptions are only two periods, negative and positive. The analysis supports understanding the “Son of God” not as a negative or arrogant ruler, but as a positive, messianic figure who combines Davidic royal ideology with Danielic apocalyptic themes. Finally, the paper points out similarities between 4Q246 and Luke 1:32-35, suggesting they share theological ideas rather than having a direct literary connection.

Keywords: 4Q246, Aramaic Daniel Apocryphon, Qumran Aramaic, Son of God, Davidic messianism, Son of Man, apocalyptic literature, Dead Sea Scrolls, Luke 1:32-35

Povzetek: Aramejski Danielov apokrif (4Q246) velja za eno najbolj diskutiranih aramejskih besedil najdenih med mrtvomorskimi zvitki predvsem zaradi omembe osebe, imenovane ‚Božji Sin‘ (ברה די אל) in ‚Sin Najvišjega‘ (בר עליון). Fragmentarno stanje zvitka in od tod izhajajoča sintaktična dvoumnost besedila sta vodila v različne interpretacije, pri čemer nekateri vidijo to osebo kot bogokletnega tujega kralja, drugi pa kot pozitivnega, eshatološkega odrešenika. Ta članek preučuje 4Q246 s pomočjo filološke in strukturne analize. Vsebuje izdajo, prevod in podrobni jezikovni komentar besedila, skupaj z novim predlogom razdelitve dela glede na izmenjavanje pozitivnih in negativnih delov (A1–B1, A2–B2,

A3–B3), ki pojasnjuje notranjo strukturo besedila. Čeprav besedilo trikrat zamenja obdobje, ki ga opisuje, sta logična referenta opisov samo dve obdobji, negativno in pozitivno. Analiza podpira razumevanje »Božjega sina« ne kot negativnega ali arogantnega vladarja, ampak kot pozitivne, mesijanske figure, ki združuje pričakovanje mesije iz Davidovega rodu z apokaliptično figuro Sina človekovega iz Danielske tradicije. Nazadnje članek opozarja na podobnosti med 4Q246 in Lukom 1,32-35, kar kaže, da imata skupne teološke ideje, čeprav je nemogoče z gotovostjo sklepati na neposredno literarno povezavo.

Ključne besede: 4Q246, aramejski Danielov apokrif, kumranska aramejščina, Božji Sin, mesija iz Davidovega rodu, apokaliptična literatura, Mrtvomorski rokopisi, Luka 1,32-35

Among the scrolls discovered in the Judean Desert, there is also one labelled as 4Q246, which has been given various names, such as "Aramaic Daniel Apocryphon" (Puech 1996, 165), "Fragmentary Aramaic Apocalypse" (Kuhn 2007), or "The Son of God Apocalypse" (Beyer 2004, 145).¹ The text was acquired in 1958 and entrusted to J. T. Milik, who was responsible for preparing it for publication. Milik presented the text in a lecture at Harvard in 1972 but never published it. However, he sent a partial transcription of the text to some scholars who were present at the event, and Fitzmyer published this in 1974. Since then, the text has been hotly debated by scholars, although the full text was not published until 1992 by Emile Puech, who also prepared an edition of the text for the collection "Discoveries in the Judean Desert" (1996).

The text preserved in 4Q246 has attracted much attention because it mentions the mysterious figure known as "the Son of God" and "the Son of the Most High" (II, 1). However, the fragmentary nature of the text makes its interpretation uncertain and difficult. The history of scholarly debate clearly illustrates this, and Tucker Ferda correctly pointed out: "History has preserved less than two columns of 4Q246. But of what has survived, it is hard to say anything without stepping on some critic's toe." (Ferda 2014, 150)

This paper presents a new examination of 4Q246, highlighting its interpretive challenges, which are reconsidered in light of a detailed analysis of the text. The main goal of the paper is to review scholars' opinions and determine which one is most likely, while also providing additional arguments in support of that view. The paper employs a philological-structural approach to 4Q246. By "philological," I refer to the close examination of the text's grammar, orthography, and morphology in light of other Aramaic texts and Aramaic grammar, in order to establish the most reliable reading of each clause and to identify the places where the text al-

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lows for many readings. By “structural,” I refer to the analysis of the text’s internal organization, its alternation of motifs of destruction and restoration, its recurrent vocabulary, and its literary symmetry. Rather than reconstructing historical events behind the text, this approach seeks to explain how the composition itself generates meaning through its linguistic and structural features. The integration of these two levels of analysis enables a reevaluation of the “Son of God” passage, clarifying the relationship between linguistic detail, literary architecture, and theological message. Consequently, the paper is divided into two main sections: the first section includes an edition and an English translation of the text, along with a brief linguistic commentary necessary due to its fragmentary nature. The second section discusses the key interpretative challenges and presents the reasoning behind what seems to be the most plausible explanation. The conclusion summarizes the paper’s main findings.

1. The Text Edition and Linguistic Notes

1.1 Edition

The edition below was prepared using images of the scroll published on the webpage The Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library. In creating this edition, previous editions were consulted, including Puech (1996) for “Discoveries in the Judean Desert,” Fitzmyer (1993), Cook (1995), Beyer (2004), and Segal (2014). The edition presented here suggests restorations of readings in lacunas only when they are highly likely. When a letter is difficult to read or its corresponding consonant is unclear, a dot is placed above it.

Column 1

1.	ע[... ליהויה שרת נפל קדם כרסיא	[...] Settled [u]pon it. And he fell down in front of the throne
2.	מ[... ל]כא [ל]עלמא אתה רגז2 ושנך	[... The k]ing: Anger will come to the world and your years...
3.	א[... חווך וכלא אתה עד עלמא	[...] Your vision. All will come (to happen) until eternity.
4.	ר[... רבין עקה תתא על ארעא	[... M]ighty ones, oppression will come upon the earth.
5.	ל[... מ]דינתא	[...] And great battles to the provinces.
6.	מ[... מ]לך אתור [מ]צרין	[...] The king of Asyria and Egypt.
7.	ר[... ר]ב להוה על[א]רעא	[...] Will be great upon the earth.
8.	י[... ע]בדון וכלא ישמשון	[...] They will [ma]ke and all will serve.
9.	ר[... ר]בא יתקרא ובשמה יתכנה	[...] He will be called the [gr]eat one, and by his name he will be named.

² There is a small dot between א and ט, but probably this is a mistake and does not stand for any letter.

Column 2

1.	ברה די אל יתאמר ובר עליון יקרונה בזיקא	He will be called the son of God, and they will call him the son of the highest. Like strikes
2.	די חזיתא כן מלכותהן תהוה שני[ן] ימלכו	that you saw, so will be their kingdom. For year[s] they will reign over
3.	ארעא וכלא ידשוון עם לעם ידוש ומדינה למד[ינ]ה	the earth and will trample everything. A people will trample another people and a province another provi[n]ce.
4.	tacav tacav עד יקום עם אל וכלא יניח מן חרב	<i>vacat</i> Until the people of God raises /Until he rises the people of God/ and makes everything rest /everything rests/ from the sword <i>vacat</i>
5.	מלכותה מלכות עלם וכל ארחתה בקשוט ידי[ן]	His /their/ kingdom will be eternal kingdom and all his /their/ paths in truth. He /they/ will jud[ge]
6.	ארעא בקשוט וכלא יעבד שלם מן ארעא יספ	the earth with truth and all will make peace. Sword will pass from the earth
7.	וכל מדינתא לה יסגדון אל רבא באילה	and all the provinces will prostrate to him /them/. El, the great, will be in his /their/ strength.
8.	הוא יעבד לה קרב עממין ינתן בידה וכלהן	He will wage war for him /they/. He will place the people in his /their/ hands and cast all of them
9.	ירמה קדמוהי שלטנה שלטן עלם וכל תהומי	before him /they/. His /their/ dominion will be eternal dominion and all the abysses

1.2 Orthography, Linguistic Observations, and Provisional Dating

The text is written in the Herodian style, named after King Herod the Great, as numerous Hebrew and Aramaic documents from his reign are written in this style. Milik's dating of the text's writing to the last third of the 1st century BC was accepted by most scholars (Puech 1996, 166; Machiela 2023, 254) and was not questioned. The peculiarity of this text is that the letters ך and ך are difficult to distinguish. As Machiela notes, "[t]he scribal preparation and script are among the highest quality of the Qumran Aramaic corpus, and compare favorably even with 1Q20 (apGen)" (2023, 254).³

The linguistic ambiguities of the text appear in column I due to the lacunae in the text.⁴ It is not known who are the logical subjects of the grammatical pronouns employed in words ע[לוהי] (I, 1), שרת (I, 1), and נפל (I, 1), which begin the text. It must be someone who falls down in front of a king, but it is not clear who this person is. Furthermore, the text does not specify who the logical subject of the verbs להוה (I, 7), יתקרא (I, 9), יתכנה (I, 9), יתאמר (II, 1) is. This poses a significant interpretive challenge, as it is unclear whether this figure plays a positive or negative role. Once again, the problem of logical referents of the grammatical persons is evident in the word מלכותהן (II, 2), as it is not clear whether "they" are those who call an unknown logical referent "the son of the Most High," or another group of people.

³ For basic information on 1Q20, see Skralovnik 2018, 707–710 and the forthcoming paper he wrote together with Matjaž (2025).

⁴ See Krajnc (2025) for a detailed linguistic, primarily syntactic, analysis of the text.

While the second column is fully preserved, it still does not allow a straightforward interpretation of the logical referents of grammatical persons. The orthographical inconsistency in writing the letters ܘ and ܝ complicates the interpretation even more, as it is difficult to know whether the hollow verbs יקום and יניה are used in the C, D, or G-stem. G-stems of these two verbs are monovalent, while the D and C-stems are polyvalent, which means that a verbal clause likely includes two or more logical subjects. From the photography of the scroll published through *The Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library*, it is clear that the first and the third letter of the verb יקום are written almost identically. Comparing the tail of this letter to the tail of ܘ in the word מלכותה used in the following line, one can observe that the tail of ܘ is substantially longer than the tail of the letter used in the word יקום. Furthermore, the scribe tends to write ܝ as slightly wider than ܘ, and the letter in this word appears to be too wide for ܘ. While it is impossible to completely exclude the reading of the word as יקום, from the orthographical point of view, this is less likely. If one reads the verb with ܝ, then it must be interpreted as being in the D or preferably C-stem. The root *vqwm* in C-stem has the meaning “to make someone rise,” which would entail that עם אל is the direct object of the verb and that the clause entails that someone raises the people of God. This person could be the individual holding high titles in the foregoing. If, on the other hand, one reads the verb as written with the letter ܘ, then it must be interpreted as being in the G-stem; in this case, עם אל is the subject of the verb. As it is said, the former reading is more plausible from the orthographic point of view.

Another example where it is not possible to determine who the logical subject of the grammatical pronoun is, is the word מלכותה (II, 5). Is it the people of God (עם אל), God, or perhaps the one being attributed the high titles in I, 9–II, 1 (if different from the one who raises the people of God in II, 4)? The same holds true for most of the remaining 3msg grammatical subjects (II, 5, [II, 5], ידי [II, 5], [II, 5], לה [II, 7], באילה [II, 7], הוא [II, 8], יעבד [II, 8], לה [II, 8], ינתן [II, 8], בידה [II, 8], ירמה [II, 9], קדמוהי [II, 9], שלטנה [II, 9]), which appear in the subsequent section. The interpretation ultimately depends on the interpretation of 4Q246 as a whole, i.e., on the interpretation of its structure, which suggests that philological analysis needs to be supplemented with structural analysis.

Even a quick glance at the text reveals that its vocabulary is highly repetitive; the word כל is used nine times, מלכא six times, and ארעא five times (Sayyad Bach 2020, 225–26). The words אל, עליון, תהום, and איל are Hebraisms, and the word נחשירון is a loan word from Persian (Puech 1996, 167). The performative of 3msg is /- with the verbs from the root *vhw*y, as in BA and in other Dead Sea scrolls in Aramaic (GQA, §37b10), and is formed to avoid writing God’s name (BARD, §268a). The orthography of the text is sometimes not consistent, especially with regard to *matres lectionis*: sometimes they are omitted (קשוט in I, 5 vs. קשט in II, 6); the final *ē* in III-y verbs is written with ה in להוה (I, 7), יתכנה (I, 9), and תהוה (II, 2), while in תתא (I, 4) it is written with א (Beyer 2004, 2:145–146).²⁵ The ܢ does not assimilate (חרב מן [II, 4]; מן ארעא [II, 6]; מדינתא [II, 7]; ינתן [II, 8];). Other examples from QA show that the assimilation of *n* was widespread, and its absence (GQA, §3a1)

could perhaps indicate that the text was written in Aramaic closer to IA and BA. The assimilation of *n* in the preposition ܢܐ is, for example, not attested in IA and is only rarely attested in BA. In QA, however, it becomes common (GQA, §3a1). Linguistic evidence, therefore, indicates the text emerged at a certain point between 164 BC and the turn of the era. The proximity to BA regarding the non-assimilation of *n* with the preposition ܢܐ suggests an early date within this period, or alternatively, that the text was written in a literal dialectal form and does not reflect actual pronunciation in everyday life. This means that the *terminus post quem* of the text is the death of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (164 BC), as the book of Daniel to which the text is related was written after his reign. The *terminus ante quem* is 30 BC, as the paleographical characteristics of the only known attestation of the text indicate.

2. Discussion

As noted above, the text has been a subject of debate ever since Milik's lecture on it. Four main interpretative questions can be identified in the scholarly literature. First and foremost, whether the figure called "the Son of God" is seen positively or negatively. This question, as will be explained below, is closely linked to the structure of the text. The second question, which relates to the first, concerns the nature of the Son of God. This question is linked to the conceptuality of Second Temple Judaism and, therefore, requires an answer that contextualizes the text within its conceptual framework. Based on the answers to these two questions, it appears that there are two additional questions. One addresses the relationship between the Son of God and the People of God; the other focuses on the connection between 4Q246 and the Gospel of Luke. The discussion that follows explores these four questions, explaining why they arise, how scholars have previously addressed them, and what seems to be the most likely solution considering the presented arguments.

2.1 Son of God: Positive or Negative Figure?

The initial interpretation of the figure of the Son of God was negative. Milik, the first scholar to examine the text, interpreted the figure as referring to the Seleucid king Alexander Balas in an unpublished talk he gave at Harvard University in 1972 (Fitzmyer 1974, 392). This view was challenged by Fitzmyer, who was in the audience when Milik presented his talk. Fitzmyer addressed the figure of the Son of God in his 1974 paper, concluding that the text is an apocalypse and that the figure of the Son of God is Jewish and therefore a positive figure (1974, 393). However, he insisted that this figure is a historical heir of the throne of David, not a messianic figure (393). Later, in 1993, after Puech had published the entire text, he offered a more detailed analysis and again affirmed that the text is apocalyptic and that the figure of the Son of God is a Jewish monarch, not the Messiah (Fitzmyer 1993).

The disagreement over the role of the Son of God first arose when the text was introduced to the scholarly community. Since then, numerous papers addressing this question have been published, yet there remains no consensus on whether the Son of God plays a positive or negative role. Scholars who viewed the figure as a negative character (Milik; Flusser 1980; Puech 1992, 1994, 1996, 1999a, 1999b;⁸ Cook 1995; Steudel 1996; Beyer 2004; Justnes 2009; Segal 2014; Kratz 2019) often emphasized that prior to II, 4, the text discusses a period of chaos and that the Son of God mentioned in this part must be a character responsible for turmoil (Steudel 1996; Justnes 2009, 86, 150; Segal 2014; Kratz 2019). With the exception of Flusser, who claimed that the Son of God is a negative eschatological figure similar to Beliar in *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah* (1980, 34), and Segal, who argued that the Son of God is a heavenly representative of an evil earthly empire (2014, 312), most scholars generally identified the Son of God as a Seleucid king. They most often equated him with Antioch IV Epiphanes (d. 164 BC) or Antioch's son Alexander Balas (d. 145 BC).

The other group of scholars viewed the Son of God as a positive figure (Fitzmyer 1974; 1993; Zimmermann 1998; García Martínez 1992; 2007, 2:20–32; Cross 2003; Kuhn 2007; Collins 2010; Knibb 2010; Ferda 2014; Kratz 2019; Schäfer 2020, 38–44). Except for the aforementioned Fitzmyer, all these scholars agree that the figure of the Son of Man is a messianic figure connected to the coming of God's people and messianic peace. These scholars presented different arguments for the positive view. They often referenced similar vocabulary in the Gospel of Luke (1:30-35) (Kuhn 2007, 32–38; Brooke 2019, 31–32), similarities between the Son of God and other Messianic figures found in Qumran (García Martínez 1992, 173–179; Kuhn 2007, 32), and the clear allusion of 4Q246 to the Book of Daniel and the figure of the Son of Man who is given eternal kingship (Kuhn 2007, 26–32; Knibb 2010, 416; Ferda 2014, 158). However, the strongest point from some of these scholars is that the structure of 4Q246 shows evidence of the positive nature of the Son of God (Zimmermann 1998, 181–182; Cross 2003; Kuhn 2007, 29–30; Collins 2010, 177; Schäfer 2020, 43).

This means that both options refer to the structure of the text as evidence for the positive or negative portrayal of the Son of God. Scholars who argue that the Son of God is a negative figure typically see a clear distinction between II, 4-9, which discusses the period of salvation, and I, 4–II, 3, which covers the time of destruction and chaos (Steudel 1996, 515; Puech 1996, 183; Justnes 2009, 86, 150; Segal 2014, 301; Kratz 2019, 12–13). However, this division is problematic due to specific references to battles and destruction in II, 8-9, as Zimmermann has pointed out:

“If a correct temporal sequence was involved, we would not expect to find, after the description of the rule of peace in II:4-7 (which encompasses the establishment of peace for all and the ‘removal of the sword’), the subject of wars and subjugation being brought up again.” (1998, 181–182)

In other words, because II, 4 mentions the times of salvation and the positive character of the people of God, which is then followed by another mention of the period of turmoil and battles, the argument that the text is divided into the description of the times of turmoil (I, 4–II, 3), where the Son of God is mentioned as a negative figure, and the description of the times of salvation, is poorly supported, since section II, 4-9 contains descriptions of both the times of salvation and peace and the times of battles.

Once it is shown that any argument that would be built on the structural division of the text before II, 4, is ill-founded,⁵ it is incumbent upon scholars to address the structure of the text, as this is crucial in determining whether the Son of God is a positive figure. The fact that in II, 4-9 the text refers to both positive and negative times suggests that the preceding text also oscillates between positive and negative times. This observation should be taken into account in any interpretation of 4Q246 and clearly indicates that the text alternates between describing good and bad periods. In his 2003 paper, Frank Moore Cross divided the text into the following parts:

Prologue (I, 1-3)

A1: War and perishing kings (I, 4-6)

B1: The coming of a Messianic king (I, 7–II, 1a)

A1: War and perishing kings (II, 1b-3)

B2: The coming of the Messianic king (II, 4-9)

Cross rightly noted the alternation between positive and negative parts in the structure of the text. However, here it should be noted that Cross's division is again making the same mistake of viewing II, 4 as an absolute mark of a positive, messianic period. His division should be further amended into the following:⁶

Prologue (I, 1-3)

A1: War and perishing kings (I, 4-6)

B1: The coming of a Messianic king (I, 7–II, 1a)

A2: War and perishing kings (II, 1b-3)

B2: The coming of a Messianic king (II, 4-7)

A3: Waging of war (II, 8-9a)

B3: The victory of a Messianic king/people (II, 9b)

⁵ The examples with **אני** that Beyer (2004, 2:145-146) notices are probably not orthographic inconsistencies as the word should not be interpreted as the personal pronoun with an assimilated *n*.

⁶ In his publications, Puech changed his opinion regarding the nature of the Son of God. In his early texts (1992; 1994; 1996), he concluded that the negative interpretation is preferable, whereas in later texts (2004), he gave preference to the positive interpretation. It should be noted that, even in early publications, he argued that both positive and negative interpretations are plausible.

This division suggests that 4Q246 employs three narrative alternations between positive and negative sections, preceded by a prologue that situates the text within the context of other texts that speak of dream interpretations at the royal court.⁷ The narrative alternation does not imply that the text describes future events in a linear, chronological manner, but rather should be interpreted as describing the times of turmoil, the battle through which they will end, and the times of (messianic) peace in three sections, in which the description of negative and positive events alternate. A similar approach to describing future events is also evident in Dan 7, where the narrative order should not be equated with the chronological order of the events described (Goldingay 2019, 350–351).

As for 4Q246, in the first alternation (A1 [I, 4-6] and B1 [I, 7–II, 1a]), the mention of the kings of Assyria and Egypt, who are somehow linked to oppression, is followed by a description of the defeat of those conquered by the Son of God, to whom all will serve. Note that the elements from A1 are alluded to in B2: רב[רבין] in A1 are echoed in the title רב and רבא in B1; oppression upon the earth על ארעא (A1) is juxtaposed with coming of the great upon the earth (על ארעא) (B1). The tyranny that the mighty ones, who are somehow linked to the king of Assyria and Egypt, cause is transformed into the true greatness of the Son of God to whom all serve.

The second alternation resumes with a description of turmoil (A2 [II, 1b-3]), followed by the appearance of God's people and a period of peace (B1 [II, 4-7]). This section also shows that the author contrasts the negative period with the positive. The kingdom of the oppressors will be brief, like the meteors seen by the supposed dreamer (II, 2-3), which sharply contrasts with the everlasting kingdom (II, 5). The trampling in II, 3 finds its counterpoint in the final rest from the sword (II, 4) and universal peacemaking (II, 6). The chaotic people who trample each other (II, 3) are replaced by the mention of God's people (II, 4), and the provinces that trample each other in II, 3 bow down to the Son of God/People of God in II, 7.

In the third alternation (II, 8-9), the passage clearly describes the battle that ended the turmoil and brought about the peaceful days outlined earlier. The third alternation is not well preserved, and, therefore, it is not possible to draw many connections between the two parts. However, it is clear that the battle (II, 8) resolves into the eternal dominion (II, 9) and that the conflict is resolved.

The text presents two distinct periods in human history: a period of peace and a period of oppression and war. The shift between describing the positive and negative periods is a structural feature of the text, and the figure of the Son of God appears in the part of the text that discusses the positive period (B2). Furthermore, it should be noted that in the preserved section, the first and the second alternations do not mention the battle itself, but only describe the days of peace (B1 and B2) or the days of turmoil (A1 and A2). The battle is mentioned only in the third alternation (A3 and B3), which provides a backward explanation

⁷ Including the argument of Steudel (one the most convincing argument for the negative interpretation of the Son of God), according to which the part after II, 4 offers the salvific counterpart of the turmoil mentioned in I, 3–II, 3 (Steudel 1996, 515–516).

of why and how the times of turmoil came to an end. Therefore, the text does not straightforwardly mention the battle that establishes the days of peace, although it presupposes this already in the first alternation, describing the days of turmoil and the days of peace. The structure of alternation between positive and negative periods makes it plausible that the figure of the Son of God is a positive figure, as many scholars claimed (Fitzmyer 1993, 169; Zimmermann 1998, 181–182; Cross 2003, 152–154; Kuhn 2007, 29–30; Collins 2010, 177; Schäfer 2020, 43). This shows that 4Q246 was intentionally crafted with internal parallelism; not just a narrative switch, but a verbal and conceptual mirroring that emphasizes the contrast between the perishing kingdoms (A) and the divine/messianic kingdom (B). Similar vocabulary functions as lexical hinges, illustrating the shift of human power into divine sovereignty. It should be noted that this cannot be proved beyond a reasonable doubt, as the text is fragmentary. However, given the current state of the text, which clearly presupposes the alternation of good and bad times, it is the most plausible explanation and can be legitimately accepted. As will be shown later in the paper, it aligns well with the Messianic interpretations of Second Temple Judaism.

2.2 Who is the Son of God?

Once accepting that the Son of God is a positive figure, one should also explore the question of this Son of God's identity. Who is he, and how should he be understood within the context of Second Temple Judaism? As the structure of the text shows, the Son of God is a figure connected to the coming of a time of peace. Additionally, the text is called "Aramaic Daniel Apocryphon" because it clearly demonstrates links to the canonical book of Daniel. These two points suggest that the Son of God is a messianic figure in whom at least two traditions from the Hebrew Bible converge.

The first tradition is linked to the promise of an eternal duration of the Davidic monarchy presented in 2 Sam 7:12-16:

"When your days are fulfilled, and you lie down with your fathers, I shall raise up your seed (וְהִקִּימְתִי אֶת־יֹרְעָךְ) after you, who shall go out from you, and I will establish his kingdom (וְהִכִּינֹתִי אֶת־מַמְלַכְתּוֹ). He shall build a house to my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever (וְכִנְנֹתִי אֱנִי אֶהְיֶה). I will be his father, and he will be my son (אֶת־כִּסֵּא מַמְלַכְתּוֹ עַד־עוֹלָם). If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the staff of men and with the stripes of the son of men. And my mercy shall not depart from him as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before thee (וְנִאֲמַן בְּיָתֶךָ וּמַמְלַכְתְּךָ עַד־עוֹלָם לְפָנַי). Your throne shall be established forever (עַד־עוֹלָם)."

In this text, the Lord gives a promise of the eternal duration of his kingdom to David, which is stressed by the twice-repeated prepositional phrase עַד־עוֹלָם (vv.

12, 16) always said of the kingdom. The second element in this text, important for the interpretation of 4Q246, is the usage of the metaphor father-son to describe the relationship between the Lord and the future king. This metaphor is also present in some other passages of the Hebrew Bible. In Psalm 89:4-5, 26-27, this theme is repeated when the text once again speaks of the eternal duration of the kingdom of David's seed (vv. 4-5) and links this with the vocabulary of divine sonship:

"I made a covenant with my chosen one. I have sworn to David my servant. I will establish your seed forever (עַד־עוֹלָם אֶכֶּיֶן וְרַעַדְךָ). I will build his throne from generation to generation. Selah." (vv. 4-5)

"He shall cry to me: 'You are my father, my God (אֲבִי אֱתָהּ אֱלֹהִי), and the rock of my salvation.' And I will give him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of earth." (vv. 27-28)

The depiction of the Davidic king as a son of the Lord is also found in the Book of Chronicles, the post-exilic retelling of the Deuteronomistic history (1 Chr 28:6):

"And he said to me: 'Solomon, your son, he shall build my house and my courts for I have chosen him to be my son and I shall be his father (כִּי־בְחַרְתִּי בְּךָ לְבֵן וְאֲנִי אֶהְיֶה־לְךָ לְאָב)'" (1 Chr 28:6)

Once again, the same metaphor of presenting the king as a Son of the Lord is present in Ps 2:7, which is linked to the ceremony of the coronation of Davidic kings:

"I will declare the decree of the Lord. He said to me: 'You are my son (בְּנִי אֲנִי אֶתָּהּ); today I have begotten you.'" (Ps 2:7)

These texts lay the foundation for the connection between the eternal duration of the Davidic kingdom and the theology of divine sonship, which is one of the ways the Hebrew Bible refers to the king of the eternal Davidic kingdom. The Son of God in 4Q246 represents such a royal figure, as highlighted by many scholars who have also identified the link between the Son of God and the theology of divine sonship described in the Hebrew Bible, especially in relation to the Davidic kings (Fitzmyer 1993, 170–171; Puech 1996, 181; Kuhn 2007, 30).

Pace Fitzmyer, who insisted on a non-Messianic interpretation of the Son of God and claimed that he is an expected historical Judean king, should be noted that there is sufficient evidence indicating that even in pre-Christian Judaism, the promise of a Davidic king was understood in messianic terms, as this is clear from the Psalms of Solomon, which can be dated to a period between 112 BC and the early first century AD (Wright 1983, 641):

"21. Behold, the Lord, and raise up for them their king, a son of David (ἀνάστησον αὐτοῖς τὸν βασιλέα αὐτῶν· υἱὸν Δαυίδ), to rule over (τοῦ βασιλεῦσαι ἐπὶ) your servant Israel in the time that you know, O God.
/.../

32. He will be a righteous king over them, taught by God, there will be no unrighteousness among them during his reign, because everyone will be holy (ὅτι πάντες ἅγιοι), and their king will be the Lord Messiah (καὶ βασιλεὺς αὐτῶν χριστὸς κυρίος).” (Pss. Sol. 17, 32 [Wright 2007, 186; 194])

While Fitzmyer correctly notes that 4Q246 does not mention the word “Messiah,” it is important to recognize that the language emphasizing divine sonship clearly invoked promises of a future Davidic king, who was understood in a Messianic context at that time. This is further supported by 4 Ezra, a Jewish apocryphal text traditionally dated around 100 AD (Metzger 1983, 520), where the Messiah is also depicted as God’s son (13:21-56) and as originating from David’s line (12:32).

The second tradition in the Hebrew Bible, as found in 4Q246, is attested in the Book of Daniel. As all scholars agree, 4Q246 heavily relies on Danielic lore.⁸ This is most evident in the use of the same roots, words, and even entire clauses, as shown in a comprehensive list by Reinhard Kratz (2019, 16):

Common element	4Q246	Dan
všmš	I, 8	7:10
vdwš	II, 3	7:23
vqwm	II, 4	2:44; 7:4, 24
עם	II, 4 [עם אל]	7:27 [עם קדישי עליגין]
מלכותה מלכות עלם	II, 5	3:33; 7:27
vdyn	II, 5	7:10, 22, 26
קרב	II, 8	7:21
vntn/vwhb + בידה	II, 8	7:21
שלטנה שלטן עלם	II, 9	4:31; 7:14

Table 1: *The usage of the vocabulary from Daniel in 4Q246.*

This correspondence of vocabulary makes it practically impossible that the author of 4Q246 would not have depended on the Danielic tradition. As evident from the list, all the shared vocabulary appears in Dan 7, which therefore is a crucial text for understanding 4Q246.

Although it is not possible to delve into the details of Dan 7 here,⁹ it is essential to understand this chapter to interpret 4Q246 correctly. This chapter consists of verses that narrate Daniel’s visions (vv. 2b-14, 21-22) and verses that provide an interpretation of these visions (vv. 15-20, 23-27). Scholars noted that the text is ordered in a repetitive way and that the content of the visions is repeated four times: symbolic vision (vv. 2-14); framework of interpretation (vv. 17-18); further symbolic vision material (vv. 19-22); interpretation of that detail (vv. 23-27) (Goldingay 2019, 350).¹⁰ In this regard, it is crucial to note that the repetitive nature in which Dan 7 is structured implies that the events which it is describing are not

⁸ A similar structure of three parts that contain positive and negative events was suggested by Kuhn (2007, 30).

⁹ For the bibliography of scholarly literature on Dan 7, see Goldingay 2019, 329–332.

¹⁰ Goldingay (2019, 352–353) mentions the disagreement among scholars about the composition history

linear but rather four descriptions of the same event.

One of the main figures in Dan 7 is the Son of Man mentioned in vv. 13-14, who is described as being given “dominion, honor, and kingdom” (שָׁלֹטֹן וְיָקָר וּמְלָכֻת); his dominion is eternal and his kingdom will never be destroyed (v. 14). The act of granting eternal kingship is repeated in v. 18, where it is said to be given to the holy ones of the Most High (קִדְיִשֵׁי עֲלִיּוֹנִין) (v. 18). The same group is said to receive the kingdom in the two other mentions of this act (vv. 22, 27). While this isn’t the place to discuss who the Son of Man in Daniel is, it should be noted that he is similar to the holy ones of the Most High, and the kingdom of the Son of Man from v. 14 is the same as the one received by the holy ones of the Most High.

Considering that 4Q246 mentions the Son of God (II, 1), followed by a reference to the people of God (II, 4), and that both figures are most likely presented positively, it seems probable that the figure of the Son of God in 4Q246 combines the Son of Man from Danielic tradition with messianic expectations of a future royal Messiah who will be the Son of God and reign over Israel (2 Sam 7:12-16; Pss 2:7; 89:4-5, 26-27; 1 Chr 28:6). This merging of two Old Testament traditions is also reflected in the New Testament, where Jesus is described as the expected Davidic Messiah and the Son of Man from Daniel, as seen clearly in Mark 14:61-62 and Luke 1:32-33. Additionally, this fusion is evident in the Book of Similitudes and 4 Ezra, where a Danielic ruler appears as the Messiah (Kuhn 2007, 38).

This, however, raises the question about the relationship between the Son of God as the royal Davidic Messiah and the people of God mentioned in II, 4. As will be shown in the next section, this question is closely connected to how we interpret who the referent or the logical subject of the grammatical persons in II, 4-9 is.

2.3 The Relationship Between the Son of God and the People of God

The question of the relationship between the Son of God and the people of God primarily focuses on interpreting 4Q246 II, 4-6, where it is unclear who the logical subjects of the grammatical persons are. The interpretation is further complicated because it is unclear what the verb stems are used in the two verbs appearing in II, 4.

If one examines the history of scholarship on this issue, it becomes clear that many scholars who interpreted the figure of the Son of God positively did not determine who is ultimately the logical subject of the 3msg suffixed pronoun mentioned in II, 5 (García Martínez 1992, 167; Zimmerman 1998, 185; Ferda 2014, 158n34; Schäfer 2020, 43). Fitzmyer claimed that this pronoun most probably refers to the Son of God, because the same logical subject is also said to be judging, and it is more appropriate to attribute judgment to an individual than to a group (1993, 164). The same argument is repeated by Collins (2010, 177). However, it should be noted that in Dan 7:22 judgment is said to be given to the holy ones of the Most High (לְקִדְיִשֵׁי עֲלִיּוֹנִין דִּינָא דִּיהָ). While it is possible to interpret this

of the chapter. Some scholars, mainly European, view the fourfold description of the same event as a mark of the original independence of these parts, while others stress the unity of the chapter.

clause as “judgment was given in favor of the saints of the Holy One,” it also invokes the possibility that the people are judging.

As shown in the linguistic commentary, the text of 4Q246 II, 4-9, as it stands, allows one to read it as attributing kingship to both the Son of God and the People of God simultaneously. The second column of 4Q246 is well-preserved, and this means that, nowadays, any reader familiar with Aramaic is in no better position to understand the text than its ancient readers were. If the text allows for ambiguous readings, then this should be taken into account when interpreting it. One should consider the possibility that ambiguity was already intentional in ancient times, and the author of the text aimed to demonstrate that the kingdom of the future Davidic Messianic king would be the kingdom of God’s people (Schäfer 2020, 44). Therefore, one should completely agree with Zimermann’s conclusion regarding this issue:

“It is irrelevant in the final analysis whether a proclamation is made about the sovereign or about the people as a whole, since what is said about the people applies first and foremost to the people’s sovereign; and when the sovereign is referred to, the people are also meant.” (1998, 185)

To this, one should add that the ambiguity is not an invention of the author(s) of 4Q246, but is already present in the canonical Book of Daniel, where the eternal kingdom of the Son of Man is the eternal kingdom of the holy ones.

A further clue to understanding the relationship between the royal Messiah and his people may be found in the Psalms of Solomon mentioned earlier. In Psalm 17, which offers one of the clearest examples of messianic interpretations of the promise of an eternal Davidic kingdom, the Messiah is depicted as the Davidic king whom God will raise up to rule over Israel (Pss. Sal. 17:21). The rule of this Davidic king will bring an end to injustice, because “all will be holy (ὅτι πάντες ἅγιοι), and their king will be the Lord Messiah” (v. 32). In this passage, the Messiah is the king of the people who will be holy. The kingdom where the holy ones live is the kingdom of the Messiah, and ultimately, it is one kingdom, just as the kingdom of the Son of Man and the kingdom of the holy ones of the Most High are ultimately one kingdom. Considering this, it becomes clear why the author of 4Q246 felt no need to clarify the ambiguity in the text. The kingdom of God’s people and the kingdom of the Son of God are, in the end, one and the same.

2.4 4Q246 and the Gospel of Luke

The Aramaic Daniel Apocryphon attracted most attention because it uses the terms “great” (רַבָּא) (I, 9), “the Son of God” (בְּרַה דִּי אֱלִי) (II, 1) and “the Son of the Most High” (בְּרַ עֲלִיּוֹן) (II, 1) as referring to the same individual. The Greek text of the Gospel of Luke employs the terms μέγας (1:32), υἱὸς ὑψίστου (v. 32), and υἱὸς θεοῦ (v. 35), which roughly correspond to the three Aramaic titles.

The correspondence between 4Q246 and the annunciation to Mary (Luke 1:30-35) is too obvious to claim that they are not related in a certain way. Both texts employ the aforementioned expressions, “the Son of God” and “the Son of the

Most High," to refer to the future Davidic king. Furthermore, both texts state that this future Davidic king will be called the Son of God. In both texts, the kingdom of the Davidic Son of God is described as eternal.

However, caution should be exercised when explaining the relationship between 4Q246 and Luke 1. The strong linguistic similarity and positive messianic usage of the titles suggest that both texts share the same theological tradition of expecting the Davidic king who will be the Messiah. Yet, it remains uncertain whether the author of the Gospel of Luke directly relied on 4Q246 (Fitzmyer 1993, 174). Nonetheless, 4Q246 can be very helpful for understanding the worldview and religious ideas of Jews during Jesus's time and, therefore, of Jesus's early followers, as it provides insight into how they received the Hebrew Bible and how two traditions merged: the expectation of a royal Davidic Messiah and the figure of the Son of Man. The text is thus significant not only for interpreting Luke 1 but also for understanding the broader context in which the New Testament developed, as there is abundant evidence within the New Testament of this merging of two Hebrew Bible traditions (e.g., Mark 14:61-62; Matt 26:63-64). As Allen has shown (2023), 4Q246 could also be of help in interpreting the Book of Revelation, as both texts belong to apocalyptic literature and invoke the Book of Daniel.

3. Conclusion

This reevaluation of the Aramaic Daniel Apocryphon (4Q246) demonstrates that a positive interpretation of the figure of the Son of God is preferable, as negative interpretations rely on a clear division between the descriptions of positive and negative time periods in II, 4. It has been observed that the text does not suggest such a sharp division but instead presents a threefold alternation of descriptions of positive and negative periods. This, however, is only a literary device and does not indicate a threefold factual alternation in human history. It appears that the text is repetitive, a trait also found in the similar text, Daniel 7. The figure of the Son of God is mentioned in the section referring to the positive, messianic period, which makes it a positive figure. The proposed division of the text and its explanation constitute the main original contribution of this paper to the debate on the nature of the Son of God in the text.

The study of the HB background of the title "Son of God" shows that the title refers to the promise of an eternal Davidic kingdom (2 Sam 17:12-16), where the king is regarded as the son of God (2 Sam 17:12-16; see also Pss 2:8; 89:4-5, 26-27; 1 Chr 28:6). The Psalms of Solomon (17:21, 32) suggest that when 4Q246 was written, this promise was understood in messianic terms, and that the future Davidic king was seen as a royal Messiah who would deliver his people from hardship.

The text of 4Q246 indicates it partakes at the same tradition as Dan 7, where the eternal kingdom is granted to the Son of Man and the holy ones of the Most High. Although 4Q246 does not explicitly mention the Son of Man or the Holy

Ones of the Most High, it is important to note that the structure of 4Q246 and the frequent use of terms found in Dan 7 suggest that the Son of God reflects the Son of Man and that the people of God mirror the Holy Ones of the Most High. The fact that 4Q246 does not refer to the Son of Man but instead speaks of the Son of God indicates that the author combined the future Messianic Davidic king with the figure of the Son of Man.

The Aramaic Daniel Apocryphon, therefore, provides insight into the merging of two originally separate theological ideas: the eternal kingdom of the Son of Man and the eternal kingdom of the Davidic Messiah, into one person who will rule over God's people in the end times. Understanding this text is very helpful for interpreting the New Testament, which also combines these traditions. It shows that Jewish contemporaries of Jesus merged these two ideas, as seen in Mark 14:61-62. Additionally, the author of the Gospel of Luke kept a hymn similar to 4Q246, suggesting it was created using comparable ideas to address the Davidic Messiah, who was merged with the figure of the Son of Man. There may even be a direct connection between the Gospel of Luke and 4Q246, but we cannot confirm this with our current knowledge.

Abbreviations

- BA – Biblical Aramaic.
 BARD – Cook 2020 [*Biblical Aramaic and Related Dialects: An Introduction*].
 GQA – Muraoka 2011 [*A Grammar of Qumran Aramaic*].
 IA – Imperial Aramaic
 Pss. Sol. – Wright 2007 [*Psalms of Solomon*].
 QA – Qumranic Aramaic.

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