Danker, Frederick, ed.


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The latest version of Walter Bauer’s venerable lexicon, hereafter “Danker,” has many features that enhance the work’s readability. New typographical design features, including bold and italics, render the lexical entries more transparent. The use of boldface for references to the NT makes them easier to spot within long and complex entries. Abbreviations have frequently been simplified, and a newly organized listing in the front matter will make the sometimes unfamiliar readily accessible.

Within individual entries there have been numerous changes, mostly minor. Extended definitions, the fundamental lexical strategy throughout (see p. viii), have sometimes been expanded, as has the list of translation equivalents. New lexical data, particularly from Jewish pseudepigrapha and from early Christian sources, have been added. Bibliographies have occasionally received new items. Corrections are rare and usually tailor lexical discussions to modern sensitivities in the appropriate use of gendered language. In order to illustrate what the new edition does and does not do, let me offer three detailed comparisons from different lexical classes, each item of particular interest to my own work on the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Gospel of John.

The entry for the noun σημείον exemplifies many of the alterations. After the lemma, the initial comment adds to BAGD the suggestion to “s. prec. entry,” and notes a broader range of attestation, now to include the pseudepigrapha and patristic sources, Hippolytus, Ref. 6.27.4 and Didymus the Blind on Genesis. The old entry concluded with the general translational equivalent, “sign.” Danker expands that to “‘symbol’; gener. ‘sign.’” The body of the article replicates the organization of BAGD. The first meaning is “a sign or distinguishing mark whereby someth. is known, sign, token,
indication.” Under that category appear new instances of “a sign of things to come” from the Psalms of Solomon 15:9 and Didymus the Blind. Contemporary sensitivities dictate the change of “the sign of the Son of Man” to “the Sign of the Human One,” although “(Son of Man)” is added for those who might miss the old phrase.

Like many articles, this one has considerable bibliography. Under the first meaning (“sign, token, indication”), appears a reference to “the difficult pass. B 12:5” (i.e., the Epistle of Barnabas), for discussion of which the reader is directed to “Windisch, Hdb. ad loc.; and RKraft, Did. and Barnabas ’65, 119 note.” Appropriately the remark “most recently,” which introduces those references in BAGD, is gone, and one presumes that there is not much of more recent interest on the topic. Yet is that presumption correct?

The second meaning of σημεῖον underwent substantial modification. BAGD read “a sign consisting of a wonder or miracle, an event that is contrary to the usual course of nature.” Danker now offers: “an event that is an indication or confirmation of intervention by transcendent powers, miracle, portent.” There is probably a philosophical rationale for the change, although “the usual course of nature” seems to be a more appropriate etic category than the appeal to “transcendent” power. Nonetheless, the reader will get the point that this meaning refers to really wondrous deeds and will welcome the new evidence for the positive sense of a deed done by God found in Melito’s Paschal Homily, an Agraphon of Jesus, and the Gospel of James. The negative sense of a miracle “worked by Satan or his agents” now comes with the expansion “to mislead God’s people.” The expansion of the definition seems otiose, but the lexical data remain the same.

A separate subordinate category focuses on “portent,” that is, “terrifying appearances in the heavens.” The prominence of this sense in certain relevant literature warrants the lengthy and separate treatment, but the lexical data are rather sparse, with one new passage from the Ascension of Isaiah 3:20 now added. The entry then includes a lengthy bibliography “on miracles,” the latest of which in BAGD was “W. Nicol, The Semeia in the Fourth Gosp. ’72.” Danker adds a reference to an article by Frans Neirynck in 1979. One might question the lexical utility of such a bibliography, much of which deals with theological rather than linguistic issues, but many users of both BAGD and the new Danker probably do have significant theological interests in the topic. It is doubtful whether their needs are well served by such a lengthy list of older treatments, many in German, which ignores most recent literature on the subject. There are, to be sure, some additional references to modern discussions elsewhere in the article. Thus in 2.a.α, on Mark 8:11, Danker calls attention to an article by “JGibson in JSNT 38 ’90.” The revision of the lexicon could have provided an opportunity to rethink this dimension of its contents and, where it seems appropriate, to update the extensive bibliographical references substantially. Failure to take advantage of the opportunity is the greatest disappointment in the new edition.

The student interested to know whether the Fourth Gospel’s usage of the noun is remarkable will find no more help here than in BAGD, a few bibliographical items in the
general list of treatments of “miracles” and the referral under 2.a.α to “Hdb on J 2:11 and 6:26; JBernard, ICC John 1929, I introd. 176-86; CBarrett, theGosp.acc. to St. John, ’55, 62-65.” The possibility that the meaning of term is contested within Johannine circles or between the evangelist and his sources is not explicitly raised. Once again, the many treatments in recent decades of Johannine semeia and the literary genre of which they may have been a part go unremarked.

The entry for τελείω/ω exhibits a number of analogous changes. Since this is a verb the initial lemma lists attested forms and adds a new form, the future, τελειω/sw, to the list in BAGD. The database has been expanded to include, from the pseudepigrapha, the Testament of Abraham and Testament of Gad, and, from early Christian literature, Ath. R., i.e., Athenagoras, De Resurrectione.

The article is organized into three sub-sections, two of which have extended definitions. To the first in BAGD, “complete, bring to an end, finish, accomplish,” Danker adds a prefatory “to complete an activity.” The second definition in BAGD had been “bring to an end, bring to its goal or to accomplishment in the sense of the overcoming or supplanting of an imperfect state of things by one that is free fr. objection.” Danker reverses the order of the italicized equivalents and the explanatory expansion. What is gained here is not at all clear, apart from consistency of format.

The first passage treated under the second meaning is Heb 2:10, to which Danker adds: “i.e., as the context indicates, he [scil. Jesus] receives highest honors via suffering and death in his identification w. humanity.” Lexicography here shades into exegesis, as may be inevitable. The point is well taken that the context intimately associates the “perfection” of Christ with his suffering, although it does not go quite far enough in noting how the usage here fits the meaning: “to overcome or supplant an imperfect state.” Nor does it do justice to the rhetorical paradox of the need of the eternal son to be “perfected,” but lexicography does have limits.

As frequently, some minor modifications reflect contemporary sensitivities. Thus at 2.d (p. 996b), where BAGD referred to the “perfection of just men,” Danker now mentions the more inclusive “perfection of upright pers.” At 2.e.β, BAGD referred to the “his [scil. The Lord’s] church,” which now becomes “his community.” This change no doubt is an instance of the policy not to allow anachronistic ecclesiastical usage to color the first-century meaning of a word (pp. viii-ix).

Such modifications are correct, perhaps too correct for some. Other modifications constitute welcome improvements over older definitions. At 2.c, BAGD defined the verb as to “fulfill, of prophecies, promises, etc., which are not satisfied until they are fulfilled.” Defining a word with itself is hardly exemplary lexicography. Danker improves to “fulfill of prophecies, promises, etc. which arouse expectation of events or happenings that correspond to their wording.”

Apart from these minor improvements, the entry is unchanged. There thus remains some untidiness in the categorization of NT passages. Considerable uncertainty is particularly evident in the categorization of instances of the verb τελειó/ω in Hebrews, which supplies the lion’s share of the examples. This is hardly surprising, since Hebrews
delights in playing with words and thereby creates nightmares for systematic
lexicography. Perhaps the best that a lexicon can do in this case is to note the general
semantic range, as defined by other relevant literature, hint at the playful polyvalence that
characterizes a given text, and then refer to the reader, as Bauer did, to relevant exegetical
literature.

For that reason the lack of updated bibliography is again regrettable. The works
mentioned in BAGD included a standard commentary from the early twentieth century,
Hans Windisch, 1905, and several learned articles, the last of which is by Olaf Moe in
Theologische Zeitschrift 5 (1949). Danker adds one further piece, by J. Duncan Derrett,
in ZNW 75 (1984): 36-43. Keeping such bibliography up to date is obviously difficult,
but in this case, a reference at least to David Peterson, Hebrews and Perfection: An
Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the ‘Epistle to the Hebrews’ (SNTSMS 47;
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) would have been appropriate. To be fair
to the lexicon, there are some more recent bibliographical entries under τελειος, but not
Peterson. Furthermore, there have been a few decent commentaries since Windisch,
which pay some attention to lexical matters. For some items cited in BAGD, such as
Käsemann’s Das wanderndes Gottesvolk, noted under meaning 3, the possible use of
τελείος in the context of mystery religions, it would be more useful for the audience of
this lexicon to cite the English translation. Some external evidence, rather than simply
Käsemann’s affirmation, would also have been welcome, especially since it is so difficult
to find.

Attention to some of the more recent secondary literature might have led to one
addition to the lexical entries. One LXX usage much discussed by those who worry
about the meaning of the verb in Hebrews is the phrase τελείοις τῶς χείρας, translating
τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς χείρας, a technical expression for priestly consecration, at Exod 29:9, 29, 33, 35; Lev
8:33; 16:32; Num 3:3. Though these usages may not be the key to unlocking the
complex play of Hebrews, they deserve mention in a lexicon of this sort.

The preposition ἀντὶ in BAGD had three sets of meanings, which can, in
somewhat simplistic fashion, be described as emphasizing replacement (“instead of”),
equivalence (“for, as”), or intervention (“on behalf of”). Danker expands the extended
definitions of these three and adds to them two new distinct categories of usage which
had been subsumed under the third meaning in BAGD: “indicating the reason for
somth., because of, for the purpose of” and “indicating result, w. implication of being
a replacement for someth., wherefore, therefore, so then.” The lexical data have not
changed, but the clear distinctions in usage are appropriate to categorize separately.
What remains difficult is the placement of the usage of John 1:16, now as before set
under meaning 2: “indicating that one thing is equiv. to another, for, as, in place of.”
The comment, preserved from BAGD, is curious: “Differently to be understood is χάριν
ἀ. χάριτος grace after or upon grace (i.e., God’s favor comes in ever new streams; cp.
Philo, Poster. Cain, 145 ….” The Philonic text is apposite, but why the Johannine usage
should not be considered a variant of the first meaning is unclear. This is a quibble with
the underlying BAGD, not with Danker.
Like its predecessor, Danker will be enormously helpful to students and scholars working with the NT. It does not stand entirely alone. It cites some passages outside of the NT that include words not defined in the lexicon itself. Under ὀντί, for instance, it cites, as a parallel to Luke 11:11, a Greek proverb ὀντί πέρκης σκορπίου. Context will enable most readers to guess the meaning of the phrase, but they will look in vain within BAGD or Danker to discover what kind of fish is a πέρκη (answer: “perch”).

Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich-Danker was a fixture on the shelves of exegetes of the NT for a generation. The new Danker is a worthy replacement, which makes some stylistic, some substantive changes that clearly improve the tool. Other changes could have been made to bring the old warhorse even further up to date, but scholars and students will still find investment in this book worthwhile. But this does mark the end of a paradigm of lexicography. The next generation of NT lexicons, whether they come in printed or electronic form, should utilize a new template, preserving the wealth of primary lexical material found in Danker, but seriously reconsidering the extent and character of modern secondary literature cited to support lexical decisions. Any new lexicon of the NT will also have to wrestle more strenuously with the ways in which exegesis and simple lexicography intersect.