

Ritualization and Power of Listing in 4QBerakhot^a (4Q286)

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Introduction

Words are powerful in many ways. In discovering the different ways in which texts acquire authority, George Brooke in his article “Authority and the Authoritativeness of Scripture: Some Clues from the Dead Sea Scrolls” distinguishes three complementary aspects to be investigated.¹ First, there is “actantial authority”, meaning that texts as literary constructs have inherent elements and relationships within them that lead them to be construed as authoritative. Secondly, “authorial and audience authority” refers to the authority created in the mutual relationship between the (both actual and implied) author and the (actual and implied) audience: authority is imposed on the audience, who may endorse the text. Thirdly, “acted authority” is about the existence and materiality of texts in certain times and places, their (successful or not) speech acts, and their relevance in terms of a wider ideological framework. These three aspects help us to understand how an investigation of authority can be directed to various facets within texts, their users and their environment, and how authority seldom lies in one aspect only (such as an authoritative author, a powerful message or a receptive audience), but in the interplay between various factors. Inspired by this starting point (but not employing the three aspects as such), I wish to explore one inner-textual feature here – that is, *lists* in 4QBerakhot^a (4Q286) – and theorize about what these sorts of lists may have achieved when performed in a ritual setting. Following Brooke’s categories, I am interested in “actantial authority” to the extent that lists can be seen to be captivating in and of themselves and important in terms of the overall power of the text. My main emphasis, however, is on the “acted authority” and the potential of lists to trigger certain cognitive mechanisms related to ritualized actions, drawing from theories of ritualization that have not previously been connected to the authority of texts.

4QBerakhot is the name of a group of five fragmentary manuscripts (4Q286–290), some of which refer to blessings of some sort, as well as curses.² The meaning of this name explicitly

¹ George J. Brooke, “Authority and the Authoritativeness of Scripture: Some Clues from the Dead Sea Scrolls”, *Revue de Qumran* 100, no. 25/4 (2012): 507–23.

² Bilhah Nitzan, “286–290. 4QBerakhot^{a-e}”, in *Qumran Cave 4.VI: Petical and Liturgical Texts, Part 1* (ed. Esther Eshel et al.; Discoveries in the Judaean Desert XI; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 1–74. See also Bilhah Nitzan, “4QBerakhot^{a-e} (4Q286–290): A Covenantal Ceremony in the Light of Related Texts”, *Revue de Qumran*

leads one to expect that it contains blessings. Discoveries of the Judean Desert editor Bilhah Nitzan characterizes the praises/blessings of the best-preserved manuscript, 4Q286, in the following way:³

- 4Q286 1: “Praise of God in His heavenly sanctuary including praise of His calendrical mysteries.”
- 4Q286 2: “The blessings of the angels in the heavenly sanctuary(ies).”
- 4Q286 3: “The blessings of the angels who rule over the realms of nature.”
- 4Q286 5–6: “The blessings of all the earthy realms.”
- 4Q286 7: “Blessings of God’s kingdom recited by the chosen people and angels in unison” (followed by curses on Belial and his lot in frag. 7).

However, we shall see below that the nature and presence of the blessings is not at all unambiguous. In this article, I restrict myself to some of the best-preserved parts of this manuscript, 4Q286 fragments 1 and 5. Even though limited, this scope is justified by the intriguing lists these fragments contain, which have no exact parallel elsewhere.⁴

Having done some preliminary work on the material reconstruction of 4Q286, I recognize that there are open questions even regarding the order of the fragments in this manuscript, let alone the sequence and nature of the ritual elements testified by the whole manuscript group of 4QBerakhot. It is thus best to look at these lists irrespective of whether or not they stood in the location where they are now placed in the manuscript.

The name 4QBerakhot can also be misleading, since it does not contain any mention of curses – even though they are explicitly introduced and extant in manuscript 4Q286.

Because of its references to blessings and curses, many scholars have thought that this composition has something to do with covenant-making and, more specifically, with the

16 (1995): 487–506; Bilhah Nitzan, “The Textual, Literary and Religious Character of 4QBerakhot (4Q286–290)”, in *The Provo International Conference on the Dead Sea Scrolls: Technological Innovations, New Texts, and Reformulated Issues* (ed. Donald W. Parry and Eugene Ulrich; Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 30; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 636–656.

³ Nitzan, “286–290. 4QBerakhot^{a-e}”, 3, directly quoted from Nitzan’s table. According to Nitzan (p. 3), “[T]he blessings are of a peculiar nature. They are addressed to God and are not benedictions addressing those who enter the covenant, as in 1QS II 2–4... [T]hey begin with blessings of the celestial creation (stars and angels) and descend gradually to blessings of the earthy creation, possibly following the liturgical pattern of Ps 103:19–21.” According to Mika S. Pajunen, “Creation as the Liturgical Nexus of the Blessings and Curses in 4QBerakhot”, in *Ancient Readers and their Scriptures: Reading the Hebrew Bible and its Versions in Jewish and Christian Antiquity* (ed. Garrick Allen and John Dunne; Leiden: Brill, forthcoming), 4QBerakhot contains “blessings of God the Creator by the entire creation, possibly in the overall sequence familiar from Genesis 1 and later accounts following it”. Cf. Jub 2; Pr Azar 1; 4Q381. According to Pajunen, the first day of creation is discernible in 4Q286 1–3 and the third day in 4Q286 5–6.

⁴ Other fragments in 4Q286 contain mostly lists, too. Most explicitly, fragments 2 and 3 list heavenly beings and spirits (“spirits”, “divine beings”, and “angels” of various weather phenomena). Whereas these fragments are potentially important for determining where in the manuscript the transfer from the heavenly realm (frag. 1) to the earthly realm (frag. 5) occurred – frags. 2 and 3 most probably continue the form of listing heavenly items – I will here focus on the better-preserved fragments 1 and 5. The curses in fragment 7 ii also mainly list objects (Belial and his followers and their characteristics) to be cursed.

covenant renewal ritual.⁵ Nitzan states, “The text of 4QBerakhot consists of a series of liturgical blessings and curses and a series of laws for an annual covenant ceremony of the community.”⁶ Some other scholars are more cautious in positing what kind of ceremony this text describes and what its relation to the “covenant renewal” found in the Community Rule 1QS may have been.⁷ Mika Pajunen has recently noted that neither covenant, law, nor Israel are mentioned in the text, and he argues that 4QBerakhot should instead be seen in light of its strong emphasis on creation: God’s creation blessing God and cursing Belial and his disruptive forces against creation.⁸

I do not aim to solve this issue here or form any overall theory of the composition. What the manuscript’s relation to any ritual behaviour and ritual setting may have been is largely unknown. The manuscript has clear liturgical markers (see below), and it presents itself as a ritual text. I am interested in this text’s potential of triggering mechanisms connected to ritualized behaviour in any type of reading/memorizing of the text (individual or collective), but especially in its use in special ritual contexts where expectations of what takes place and happens in rituals would have played a role in the performance of such traditions.

Listing heaven and earth

If we follow Umberto Eco, lists are no small thing: lists are the origin of culture, and culture seeks to make infinity comprehensible.⁹ Whereas the skills of writing and making lists formed the basis for the early formation of economics, government and education, lists not only occur in documentary texts and lexicons. More widely, they organize presentations and are also found in literary texts. Shaya Cohen argues,

Scholarship begins with lists: the organized collection, classification, and presentation of data. A list is an attempt to make order out of chaos, to take discrete

⁵ For arguments that some terminology points towards the covenant renewal setting of Ex 34, Deut 10, and Neh 9, see Bilhah Nitzan, “4QBerakhot (4Q286–290): A Preliminary Report”, in *New Qumran Texts and Studies: Proceedings of the First Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies, Paris 1992* (ed. George Brooke with Florentino García Martínez; Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah XV; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 53–71.

⁶ Nitzan, “286–290. 4QBerakhot^{a-e}”, 1.

⁷ E.g., James R. Davila, *Liturgical Works* (Eerdmans Commentaries on the Dead Sea Scrolls; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2000), 41; Russell C. D. Arnold, *The Social Role of Liturgy in the Religion of the Qumran Community* (Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 60; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 67; Jeremy Penner, “Mapping Fixed Prayers from the Dead Sea Scrolls onto Second Temple Period Judaism”, *Dead Sea Discoveries* 21, no. 1 (2014): 43–44.

⁸ Pajunen, “Creation as the Liturgical Nexus of the Blessings and Curses in 4QBerakhot”.

⁹ Umberto Eco, *The Infinity of Lists*. Translated by Alastair McEwen (London: MacLehose Press, 2009).

bits of information and to make them useful, to make connections explicit that otherwise are implicit or invisible. An organized thematic list is the result of a scholarly way of thinking.¹⁰

We inherently assume that lists have some logic in them or that they refer to an outside reality ordered in a particular way. According to Robert Belknap, lists invite their audiences to wonder: Why? Why this list in this form? Why here?¹¹ In an introduction to a volume on lists, Lucie Doležalová states:

A list is a sequence... a catalogue of items which are not connected to each other except by the means of the order and possibly by the unifying idea behind its creation. The *lack of syntax* is, in a way, a lack of direction for the recipient. Thus, much more than in a usual narrative, the reader is left on his or her own. It is possible to find a story in a list but it requires *special attention and effort* by the reader.¹²

After these preliminary remarks on the art of listing, let us first read the lists in 4Q286. The list in fragment 1 does not contain any personal verbal forms, only nouns, adjectives and participle forms, often in construct pairs or sequences, listing items in the heavenly realm or its characteristics.¹³

4Q286 1a, ii, b:1–13

text and translation by B. Nitzan, *DJD XI* (1998)

1 מושב יקרכה והדומי רגלי כְּבֹדְכָה
בְּ[מ]רוּמֵי עֹמְדָכָה וּמִדֹּר[ךָ]

1. The seat of Your honour and the footstools of
Your glory in the [h]eights of Your standing-place
and the trea[d]

¹⁰ Shaye J. D. Cohen, “False Prophets (4Q339), Netinim (4Q340), and Hellenism at Qumran”, *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 1 (2000): 55–66, 62. Similarly, Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 3: A Commentary on Psalms 101–150*. Translated by Linda M. Maloney (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 632, who traces the creation psalm tradition to Egyptian school of wisdom and scientific understanding of the world, and also to Mesopotamian prayers where gods and elements of the world are called for praising the highest god. For example, for the 4QCommentary of Genesis (4Q252) as revealing a mood of *Listenwissenschaft*, see Shani Tzoref, “4Q252: Listenwissenschaft and Covenantal Patriarchal Blessings”, in *Go Out and Study the Land’ (Judges 18:2): Archaeological, Historical and Textual Studies in Honor of Hanan Eshel* (ed. Aren M. Maeir et al.; Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 148; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 335–357.

¹¹ Robert E. Belknap, *The List: Uses and Pleasures of Cataloguing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), xii–xiv. Lists are naturally of many kinds: lists facilitate information retrieval, provide a choice of available alternatives, and form a ranking, for example. They may contain condensed information (keywords) or purely aesthetic rhythmic structure.

¹² Lucie Doležalová, “Introduction: The Potential and Limitations of Studying Lists”, in *The Charm of a List: From the Sumerians to Computerised Data Processing* (ed. Lucie Doležalová; Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 5. Emphasis mine.

¹³ There is one reconstruction of an infinitive construct in line 9, בְּהַר[אוֹתָמָה], referring to the appearances of “wondrous mysteries”. For the style of poetic parallelism in the list and the use of the preposition ב in 4Q286 1 ii:8b–11, see Nitzan, “286–290. 4QBerakhot^{a–e}”, 4–5.

- 2 קודשכה ומרכבות כבודכה כרוביהמה
ואופניהמה וכול סודי[המה]
3 מוסיי אש ושביבי נוגה וזהרי הוד
נה[ור]י אורים ומאורי פלא
4 [הו]ך והדר ורום כבוד סוד קודש
ומק[ור]ז[ו]הר ורום תפארת פ[לא]
5 [הוד]ות ומקוה גבורות הדר תשבחות
וגדול נוראות ורפא[ו]ת
6 ומעשי פלאים סוד חוכמא ותבנית
דעה ומקור מבינה מקור ערמה
7 ועצת קודש וסוד אמת אוצר שכל
מבני צדק ומכוני יוש[ר] רב
8 חסדים וענות טוב וחסדי אמת ורחמי
עולמים ורזי פל[אים]
9 בהר[אותמ]ה ושבועי קודש בתכונמה
ודגלי חודשים [...]]
10 [...]ראשי ש[נים] בתקופותמה ומועדי
כבוד בתעודות[מה] [...]]
11 [...]ושבתות ארץ במחל[קותמה]
ומו[עדי] דרו[ר] [...]]
12 [...]רוי נצח ו[...]ל [...]]
13 [...]אור וחש[בוני] [...]]
2. of Your holiness; and the chariots of Your glory, their cherubim and their wheels with all [their] councils;
3. foundations of fire and flames of brightness, and flashes of splendour, li[ght]s of flames and wondrous lights.
4. [Majes]ty and splendour, and height of glory, foundation of holiness and foun[tain of b]rightness, and height of beauty; wo[nder]
5. [of thanks]giving and a well of powers, splendour of praises and great in awesome deeds and healin[g] / healing[s]
6. and miraculous works; a foundation of wisdom and a structure of knowledge and a fountain of insight, a fountain of prudence
7. and a counsel of holiness, and a foundation of truth, a treasury of understanding; structure/s of justice, and abode/s of hone[sty; abounding]
8. in kind deeds and virtuous humility, and true kindness and eternal mercies. And wo[ndrous] mysteries
9. when th[ey app]ear and holy weeks in their fixed order, and divisions of months, []
10. [beginnings of y]ears in their cycles and glorious festivals in times ordained [for them,]
11. [] and the sabbatical years of the earth in [their] divi[sions and appo]inted times of liber[ty]
12.] eternal generations and []/[]
13. []light and reck[onings of]

Similarly, fragment 5 contains a list of nouns from the created world, and even though it is not as well preserved, it clearly creates a contrast to the list of heavenly items.¹⁴

4Q286 5a-c:1–13 text and translation by B. Nitzan, *DJD XI* (1998)

- 1 וכול הארץ וכול [א]ש[ר] עליה תבל
וכול [י]ושבי בה אדמה וכול מחשביה
2 ארץ וכול [י]קומה [הרים וכול] גבעות
גיאות וכול אפיקים ארץ צי[ה] [...]]
3 א[ר]זה מצולי יערים וכול מדברי
חור[ב] [...]]
4 ותוהיה ואושי מבניתה איים ו[...]
5 [פרי]מ[ה] עצי רום וכול ארזי לבנון
[...]]
6 דגן ת[ירוש ויצה]ר וכול תינוכות [...]]
1. [] h the earth and all [t]hat is [on it, world and all] its inhabitants; ground and all its depths
2. earth and al[l] its living things; [mountains and al]hil[l]s; valleys and all ravines; ari[d] land []
3. [] its [ce]darwood; the shady woods and all desola[te] deserts; []
4. [] and its howling places and the foundations of its pattern; hyenas and[]
5. [] the[i]r fruits, lofty trees and all the cedars of Leban[on]
6. grain, w]ine, and oil, and all produce []
7. [] and all elevated offerings of the world in twe[lve] months

¹⁴ For the repetition of the word כול 'all', see Nitzan, "286–290. 4QBerakhot^{a-e}", 5.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 7 [וכול תנופות תבל בְּחֻדְשִׁים שְׁנִי] | 8.] Your word. Amen amen <i>vacat</i> [] |
| [... עשר] | 9.] and creatures of the seas, the fountains of the deep[] |
| 8 א]ת דברכה אמן אמן <i>vacat</i> [...] | 10.] <i>m</i> and all rivers, the channels of depths [] |
| 9 [וּמְצֹר יָמִים מְעִינֵי תְהוֹם] [...] | 11.] <i>mmh</i> of the seas [] |
| 10 א]ם וְכֹל נְחָלִים יָרִי מְצֹלֹת [...] | 12. a]ll their councils ' [] |
| 11 [מִמָּהּ יָמִים] [...] | 13.] <i>skh</i> [] |
| 12 כ]ול סוּדִיָּה מָה א] [...] | |
| 13 [שְׁכָה] [...] | |

What are the markers in these lists and the manuscript which help the reader or listener to understand what the lists are about? A brief analysis of the context is in order here.

Lists of 4Q286 in context

The beginning of 4Q286 has not been preserved, so it is not known if the lists had an introduction, title or rubric of some sort. However, we may first note the presence of several (at least seven) “amen amen” responses in the manuscript, suggesting an implied liturgical setting for the text.¹⁵ One response occurs directly in the middle of the list of frag. 5 (5:8).¹⁶ Several “amen amen” responses are found in connection with the curses in frag. 7 ii. It can be concluded that lists are potentially sections which call for such a response.

In addition, we may notice the following markers, which especially mention acts of blessing and cursing, elsewhere in the manuscript:

- Some items in frag. 1 have second-person singular suffixes (1 ii 1–2), thus most likely addressing God.
- Frag. 2 includes the verb יברכו as a likely reconstruction in the sentence: בִּרְכוּ בִּי יְהוָה בולמה את שם קודשכה, “[all [will bless toge]ther Your holy name” (l. 4). The following line mentions that “[they] will curse” (l. 5).

¹⁵ The preserved “amen amen” responses are found in 4Q286 1a i:8; 5a-c:8; 7 a i, b-d:7; 7 a ii, b-d:1, 5, 10; 9:3.

¹⁶ Frag. 5 consists of at least three separate pieces, which Nitzan (DJD 1998:22) designates as 5a,b,c. Nitzan joins pieces 5a,b to piece 5c in line 6 (and line 7), but this joint can also be questioned. Both the PAM image (PAM 43.312) and the new Leon Levi DSS Digital Library image (Plate 691, Frag 2: B-498985) represent placements of these pieces that are not possible: the strokes of the letters in separate pieces as they are placed do not fit together. The placement could be corrected or, alternatively, frag. 5c might come from elsewhere in the scroll – although this possibility still remains to be confirmed. For our purposes here, it is noteworthy that, if placed together, frag. 5 forms a list of the created world order and different structures and items in it and the “amen, amen” formula breaks this list, separating the waters and their creatures from the land and its contents.

- Frag. 7 a i, b-d refers to “blessings (ברכות) of truth in the times of fe[stivals]” (l. 4) and two references to praising activity: “[...]ouncil of *elim* of purification with all those who have eternal knowledge, to prai[se and to bles]s Your glorious name in all [ever]la[sting ages]” (l. 6-7); “...they shall again bless the God of []” (l. 8).
- Frag. 7 a ii, b-d contains explicit exhortations to curse/pronounce curses, and it also includes cursing words. The curses are introduced with introductory formulas, such as “they shall say”, and the curses begin with the word ארוּר “cursed be” or ארוּרים “cursed are”.

In contrast to the cursing section of the manuscript (frag. 7 ii), no introductory formulas are preserved which are directly connected to any blessing, and no ברוך “blessed be” formulas are found. In light of the above references to blessing/praising activity, it is likely that God and his name are the referred objects of blessings in the manuscript (rather than humans, as in 1QS 2) and that this activity is repetitious – in regard to both time (e.g., references to “times of festivals”) and being mentioned in several places in the composition (references to blessing occur in several fragments in different places in the manuscript).

Other evidence for understanding the contents of 4Q286 as blessings is often derived from the parallel manuscript 4Q287.¹⁷ However, even though this manuscript contains similar themes as 4Q286, there are very few instances of direct parallels and overlaps, and one must be careful about drawing conclusions between the manuscripts.¹⁸ I wish to practise caution and problematize the neat picture that Nitzan provides of the blessings of 4Q286 (see above). Thus, we may conclude that 4Q286 contains explicit references to praising and blessing in fragments 2 and 7, as noted above (as well as to cursing in frag. 7), but neither praising nor blessing is explicitly mentioned in the lists in fragments 1 and 5 in their preserved form.

This is significant, since it means that the lists, at least as we have them, may be open to more than one interpretation. Are the listed items part of the heavenly and earthly creation

¹⁷ In 4Q287, see esp. frag. 3, “they will bless Your holy name with blessings”, “[And] all the creatures of flesh, all those [You] created, [will ble]ss You” (3:1–2); see frag. 5, “all of them [will bless] You togeth[er]. Amen, amen” (5:11).

¹⁸ See Nitzan, “286–290. 4QBerakhot^{a-c}”, 1, 3. The explicit parallels between 4Q286 and 4Q287 are found in curses (4Q286 7 ii; 4Q287 6) and in another fragment which seems to preserve a list of angels and spirits (4Q286 12; 4Q287 2b).

praising God (either praising in the present or called to join in the praising),¹⁹ or are the lists referring to items that God has created and for which he is praised?²⁰ Is the list of the heavenly realm about divine acts and results of creation, about (secret) divine characteristics and epithets, or both?²¹ Scholars seem to have identified all of these meanings in the list. Being very cautious about the nature of the lists, I tentatively speak of *contemplation* on the heavenly realm and earthly realm (rather than praises or blessings).²²

What *is* clear is that the mere listing of items gives our lists a distinct colour.²³ To step outside this manuscript for a moment, similarities with other texts and traditions have been identified, of course, but differences should also be noted. The beginning of frag. 1 reminds of *merkavah* mysticism with visions of the heavenly throne (Ezek 1, 10; Dan 7, 10; 1 Enoch 14; 4QSongs of the Sabbath Sacrifice); yet in *merkavah* mysticism, heavenly heights are described in relation to an earthly being, often in narrative form, and those features are missing in our lists.²⁴ Frag. 1 may also have been modelled according to biblical lists of divine attributes revealed to humans, such as those encountered in covenant renewal settings (Ex 34:6-7; Deut 10:17),²⁵ but the list in frag. 1 also far exceeds the biblical models in length and design.

¹⁹ See Billah Nitzan, “Harmonic and Mystical Characteristics in Poetic and Liturgical Writings from Qumran”, *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 85, no. 1/2 (1994): 163–183, 171–172, according to whom the lists describe heavenly and earthly worshippers.

²⁰ See Nitzan, “286–290. 4QBerakhot^{a-e}”, 15, and her notes for frag. 4Q286 1 a ii, b:5: the line contains “praises of God for his powerful and awesome *deeds*” (emphasis mine). In “The Praise of God and His Name as the Core of the Second Temple Liturgy”, *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 127 (2015): 475–488, Mika S. Pajunen remarks on 4QBerakhot: “[A]ll of the extant blessings are about God’s different works in creation and for these the elect community of the *Yahad* praises the name of God together with the angels (4Q286 2 and 7i)” (p. 485).

²¹ See Nitzan, “286–290. 4QBerakhot^{a-e}”, 14, and her notes for frag. 4Q286 1 a ii, b:4: “Line 4 details *attributes* having to do with God’s glory and magnificance” (emphasis mine). Similarly, Nitzan views (p. 15) lines 7–8 as containing divine attributes. See also Esther G. Chazon, “Human and Angelic Prayer in Light of the Scrolls”, in *Sapiential, Liturgical, and Poetical Texts from Qumran: Proceedings of the Third Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies, Oslo, 1998* (ed. Daniel K. Falk et al.; Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 35; Leiden Brill, 2000), 35–47, 40: “4QBerakhot opens with blessings which praise God’s attributes and describe the heavenly Temple, the divine chariot-throne, and various classes of angels.”

²² In the covenant-making contexts, heaven and earth are also referred to as *witnesses* of the covenant (Deut 30:19; 32:1). Furthermore, heavenly and earthly items might also refer to their *renewal* and new creation (cf. 4Q278 3:2–4; 4Q434 2 2–3).

²³ As Nitzan states in “4QBerakhot (4Q286–290): A Preliminary Report”, 63: “This catalogue style creates the mood of what have been called ‘Numinous Hymns’”, known from later periods.

²⁴ The list of the heavenly realm in frag. 1 of 4Q286 includes similar vocabulary as the *merkavah* visions, where to a visionary is revealed the divine court or temple with all of its numinous angelic beings and extraordinary features. The Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifices may be closest to 4Q286 in that they also contain long lists with little syntax; for the edition, see Carol Newsom, “Shirot ‘Olat Hashabbat”, in *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert XI: Qumran Cave 4 VI: Poetical and Liturgical Texts, Part 1* (ed. Esther Eshel et al.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 173–402. See further Nitzan, “Harmonic and Mystical Characteristics in Poetic and Liturgical Writings from Qumran”, 171–172.

²⁵ See Nitzan, “4QBerakhot (4Q286–290): A Preliminary Report”, 56.

The mere inventorying also sets these lists apart from many creation psalms where God is praised for wonderfully planning, forming and keeping his creation and its parts, where everything works well; these are descriptions of God’s creative acts using a variety of verbal forms: “You stretch out the heavens like a tent, you set the beams of your chambers on the waters, you make the clouds your chariot, you ride on the wings of the wind” (Ps 104:2–3; cf. Ps 147; 4Q381 1).²⁶ Our lists in 4Q286 also seem to differ from “liturgical” psalms where creation is exhorted to praise God with repetitious exhortations, such as בִּרְכוּ יְהוָה “bless Yahweh” in Ps 103:20–22 (cf. Pr Azar 1:35–65) or הַלְלוּהוּ “praise him” in Ps 148 (cf. 4QSongs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: e.g., 4Q403 1).²⁷ Biblical psalms represent what Bilhah Nitzan calls a “cosmological approach” to praise, in which all heavenly and earthly beings praise God the Creator in full harmony.²⁸ The harmony in the liturgical hymns is, according to Nitzan, created by repetitious calls for praise, the universal nature of the praise, and the repetition of certain formulas throughout the universe. She argues that 4Q286 falls under the same category.²⁹ However, repetitious calls for praise and repetitious formulas are not present (or not preserved) in 4Q286. Yet creation traditions, especially the formulaic style of Genesis 1 and creation psalms, were important influences in the sense that the listing of things and praise grew stronger in the Second Temple literature.³⁰

²⁶ For Ps 104, see Adele Berlin, “The Wisdom of Creation is Psalm 104”, in *Seeking Out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday* (ed. Ronald L. Troxel et al.; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 71–83, who argues that the created natural world in this Psalm is also God’s revelation of Himself and of the wisdom that underlies creation: “The effect of this line of thought is to make creation not only a way to praise God but also a way of access to divine wisdom—that same divine wisdom embodied in the Torah” (p. 74). See Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms* (trans. Keith Crim; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 31–41, who sees two types of statements about creation in Psalms: creation praises God and creation gives a testimony to God’s glory (mediating revelation). The idea that listing heavenly and earthly aspects has to do with access to divine wisdom is worth considering in 4Q286, too.

²⁷ See Nitzan, “Harmonic and Mystical Characteristics in Poetic and Liturgical Writings from Qumran”, 169, who distinguishes two literary forms of praise: a “descriptive” one (per Ps 104) and a “liturgical” one (per sections in Ps 103 and 148). For Psalm 148 building on Ps 93–100, as well as on Ps 103 and 104, see Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3: A Commentary on Psalms 101–150*. Translated by Linda M. Maloney, 632.

²⁸ The cosmological approach is different from a “mystical approach”, in which earthly and heavenly realms are somewhat apart from each other, so that either the praise takes place in the heavenly heights or the earthly (chosen) congregation is elevated to praise together with the heavenly one; see Nitzan, “Harmonic and Mystical Characteristics in Poetic and Liturgical Writings from Qumran”, 163–183.

²⁹ Nitzan, “Harmonic and Mystical Characteristics in Poetic and Liturgical Writings from Qumran”, 170. However, Qumran hymns differ from biblical ones, according to Nitzan, “Harmonic and Mystical Characteristics in Poetic and Liturgical Writings from Qumran”, 176, in that only the Qumran hymns include information on appointed times for praising.

³⁰ See further Mika S. Pajunen, *The Land to the Elect and Justice for All: Reading Psalms in the Dead Sea Scrolls in Light of 4Q381* (Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplements 14; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013); Pajunen, “The Praise of God and His Name as the Core of the Second Temple Liturgy”, 475–488; Pajunen, “Creation as the Liturgical Nexus of the Blessings and Curses in 4QBerakhot”.

The art of listing in 4Q286

To return to 4Q286 itself, the main point is to take seriously the lack of clues of how to interpret the lists. Even if there existed models outside of this text and features within the manuscript (not all preserved for us) directing one's interpretation, the lists themselves may also function without such interpretative contexts (or within different interpretative contexts). Our attention is directed to an apparent feature in the lists: the sense of their universal nature, their comprehensiveness, and their invitation to capture the universe in the form of lists.

Given the lack of syntax, different readers naturally understand and organize lists differently: "Lists are personal constructions that invite different interpretations from different readers."³¹ In her preliminary report on 4QBerakhot, Nitzan saw a three-part structure in the list of frag. 1.³² According to her, God is praised "by cataloguing items of three kinds":

- 1) visions of the heavenly abode and throne (l. 1–3)
- 2) divine attributes (l. 4–8b)
- 3) the mysteries of God's knowledge (l. 8c–11)

She also distinguishes "subject matters" within the list, so that it speaks of:

- 1) the heavenly throne (l. 1–2a), heavenly abode (l. 2b–3), epithets of God's glory (l. 4a–c),
- 2) divine attributes: might (l. 4d–5b), marvellous acts (l. 5c–6a), wisdom and knowledge (l. 6b–7b), justice and honesty (l. 7c), grace and mercy (l. 7d–8b),
- 3) divine mysteries: holy times (l. 9–11).

That the subject matters do not clearly follow her three-part structure may point towards the non-fixity of the boundaries of sections.

Readers differ, and lists may be understood differently. My understanding of the list in 4Q286 1 ii began by noticing the lack of verbal forms and sentences (see above). I then made sense of the list by looking for any kinds of movement or structure within it, just as Nitzan did. Since there are no structural markers (such as *vacats*) in the manuscript, the reader is called to create a structure in his/her mind. One of my preliminary perceptions of

³¹ Belknap, *The List: Uses and Pleasures of Cataloguing*, xv.

³² Nitzan, "4QBerakhot (4Q286–290): A Preliminary Report", 63.

the structuring was based on noticing connotations and moves from SPACE to LIGHT, SOUND, KNOWLEDGE, VIRTUE, and TIME, as highlighted here:³³

- [SPACE] 1. The seat of Your honour and the footstools of Your glory in the [h]eights of Your standing-place and the trea[d] 2. of Your holiness; and the chariots of Your glory, their cherubim and their wheels with all [their] councils;
- [LIGHT] 3. foundations of fire and flames of brightness, and flashes of splendour, li[ght]s of flames and wondrous lights. 4. [Majes]ty and splendour, and height of glory, foundation of holiness and foun[tain of b]rightness, and height of beauty;
- [SOUND] wo[nder 5. of thanks]giving and a well of powers, splendour of praises and great in awesome deeds and healin[g] / healing[s] 6. and miraculous works;
- [KNOWLEDGE] a foundation of wisdom and a structure of knowledge and a fountain of insight, a fountain of prudence 7. and a counsel of holiness, and a foundation of truth, a treasury of understanding;
- [VIRTUE] structure/s of justice, and abode/s of hone[sty; abounding] 8. in kind deeds and virtuous humility, and true kindness and eternal mercies.
- [TIME] And wo[ndrous] mysteries 9. when th[ey app]ear and holy weeks in their fixed order, and divisions of months, [] 10. [beginnings of y]ears in their cycles and glorious festivals in times ordained [for them,] 11. [] and the sabbatical years of the earth in [their] divi[sions and appo]inted times of liber[ty] 12. [] eternal generations and []/ [] 13. []light and reck[onings of]

This reading of the list begins with items in the divine court. These give an impression that the reader is taken to a throne room with different spatial structures, objects and agents.³⁴

The following items in the list are about fire, light, brightness, height and majesty. The next list refers to audible items (praises), but also (visible) miracles. Then the list includes all imaginable nouns related to wisdom and knowing, and it continues by listing various virtues. Finally, the list (as it is preserved) concludes by structuring time, from smaller periods (weeks) to larger ones (jubilees).

This does not mean that I regard this structuring as an absolute one, a firm one, or the only possibility. The moves from one cluster to another are not strict by any means. For example, some items may refer to many directions: the “great and awesome deeds” (l. 5) recalls the Exodus miracles (cf. Deut 10:21) and not sounds of praises; this list might better be understood together with the previous one as *foundations* on which the heavens are established and as *sources* from which everything springs. Many more intertextual

³³ For this, the list may especially be compared to 4QSongs of the Sabbath Sacrifice^d (4Q403) 1 ii 1–16, which has similar mentions of spatial items, light and sound.

³⁴ These remind of the visions in Isa 6; Ezek 1, 10; Dan 10; 1 Enoch 14.

references could also be identified and the perception of the list would change accordingly. This sort of structure was probably not intended and carefully designed by the authors; rather, the list seems to create itself naturally, as certain related words occur close to each other, certain words are repeated, and certain parts accomplish the sense of persistent listing before moving forward.

As this structure is preliminarily created in my mind, I get a sense of starting to understand what is going on in the list, but new questions also arise: Why these themes? Why does the text include some of the human senses (sight, hearing, sense of heat)? If some moral senses are referred to (giving thanks, knowledge, justice, honesty, kindness, humility), are these all there is? How are these acquired? Is the list of times a key for understanding what precedes it? By praising regularly, keeping festivals, and obeying laws related to time, does one gain access to all that is said? Or are the times also connected to cosmic items (the movement of the stars and constellations) listed since they also belong to the heavens? Thinking about these possibilities, one starts to wonder: Is there movement in the list from a less human-accessible sphere to items which are more visible, comprehensible and accessible to humans? Or are all items equally important in comprehending what the heavens are about? The more I ponder the list, the more I get the sense that it is going around and approaching the core thing, the divine, but never addressing God directly (even though the list starts with items having second-person suffixes). It does not feature any descriptions of a person sitting on the throne, as found in some of the visions of the prophets. Yet the heavens are anything but empty. Are all these lists of unequal character – some being more about inner characteristics, some more about visible outcomes – to be understood as divine servants or divine agents of some kind, performing divine tasks?³⁵

The list itself has many characteristics that may contribute to its construction of authority. The symbolic world it creates is close to things divine, and it may carry an aura of including secret information of the heavenly sphere. It builds upon earlier authoritative traditions, and it gives a sense of ordering (by writing) and extensiveness which in and of themselves may appear convincing.

³⁵ See Nitzan, “The Textual, Literary and Religious Character of 4QBerakhot (4Q286–290)”, 640: “[T]he lists of *Berakhot* mention not only the titles of those who bless the Lord, but also data concerning their dwellings, their functions, and their appearance.”

The list in frag. 5, on the other hand, is more fragmentary, and it is more difficult to make sense of it. The most noteworthy feature is the repetition of the word “all”.³⁶ It is not easy to tell if its usage remains the same or changes from one section to another in the list. This is my tentative understanding of the list:

[EARTH and ITS INHABITANTS]	1.] <i>h</i> the earth and all [t]hat is [on it, world and all] its inhabitants; ground and all its depths; 2. earth and al]l its living things;
[EARTHLY STRUCTURES and THEIR PARTS]	[mountains and al]l hil[l]s; valleys and all ravines; ari[d] land [] 3.] its [ce]darwood
[DESOLATE LAND and ITS INHABITANTS?]	the shady woods and all desola[te] deserts; [] 4.] and its howling places and the foundations of its pattern; hyenas and[]
[FORESTS and THEIR PARTS?]	5.] the[i]r fruits, lofty trees and all the cedars of Leban[on]
[CULTIVATED LAND and ITS PRODUCTS]	6. grain, w]ine, and oil, and all produce [] 7.] and all elevated offerings of the world in twe[lve] months 8.] your word. Amen Amen <i>vacat</i> []
[SEAS and WATERS]	9.] and creatures of the seas, the fountains of the deep[] 10.] <i>m</i> and all rivers, the channels of depths [] 11.] <i>mmh</i> of the seas [] 12. a]ll their councils ’[]

In the beginning, the term “all” qualifies the earth with all its inhabitants. Then the list moves to familiar earthy places, such as mountains and valleys; “all” here possibly identifies smaller parts within these structures: rivers in valleys, for example. The next part is odd, since it seems that “all” does not characterize smaller items within a larger structure, but rather there is an opposite pairing (woods – all deserts); it is possible that this part should be understood differently.³⁷ In the rest of the list, the use of the word “all” is also not clear; the list moves from listing plants, to listing various agricultural products. Then there is the

³⁶ Nitzan, “286–290. 4QBerakhot^{a-e}”, 5.

³⁷ There are various questions concerning these lines. Does the mention of “all desolate deserts” begin a new section? Furthermore, line 4 has the hapax word תוהיה. The word איים ‘hyenas’ could also be read as a plural of אֵי ‘coastland’, ‘island’. It is possible that what are listed in lines 3–5 are different types of geographical areas (e.g., woods, deserts, coastlands) with their constituent parts/inhabitants/products.

striking pause in the list by the “amen amen” formula, after which begins the list of water elements (see above).

What is similar between this list and the heavenly list in frag. 1 is the mere listing of items without any functions or actions associated with the items. However, whereas some of the items are listed in word pairs (construct and genitive), the use of the word ‘all’ directs one’s attention more to a structure of “a whole and its parts” than “equal items in sequence”. Furthermore, differently from the list in frag. 1 ii, one encounters here very few descriptive or evaluative words connected to the items. One does not know how everything works; the text just testifies to their existence. Yet if Nitzan’s reconstruction and placement of the fragment parts is followed, it is striking that in the midst of nature’s areas and constituent parts there is a list of agricultural products (l. 6–7). This gives an indication that nature also produces things for humans, as well as offerings to be given to God.

Is the list then what the reader makes of it? In detecting various features in the list, the reader of the list may wish to see more structure than there is or force items into his/her structure. Previously it was noted that the ancient readers probably had models about various types of lists and also lists of items of creation in their minds. To what extent these influenced the reading of these lists or may have resulted in different understandings of the lists is difficult to tell. But efforts to make sense of the lists and possible variations in their structuring and interpretation are in my mind crucial for understanding the function and implications of the lists and their potential impact on the power of a text like 4Q286. For this sake we need to understand the concept of ritualization.

Ritualization and focused attention

Irrespective of what kind of order the recipient of these lists constructs in his/her mind, the lack of syntax and verbal structures compels the recipient to pay special attention to the list and listing itself if s/he is to make sense of it or participate in experiencing the world as thus laid out.³⁸ Focused attention is one key feature employed by what is called ritualization – that is, activity (often taking place within rituals, but not necessarily restricted to ritual settings) characterized by the lack of an explicit goal, doing for the sake of doing, paying attention to the order of things, following mysterious rather than everyday rules. Building on

³⁸ Lists may result in being received in the opposite way, too: it is easy to skip a list and move on to other sections with more syntax. My claim is not that every list automatically evokes the interest of its reader; yet lists have the potential to appeal to the human tendency to categorization (either as a whole or as made of its parts).

Roy Rappaport's understanding of rituals, Pascal Boyer and Pierre Liénard set out the following features of ritualized action:³⁹

- Compulsion: people feel compelled to do the action.
- Rigidity and adherence to a script: an action should be done in the established way.
- Goal-demotion: actions are divorced from their usual goals.
- Internal repetition and redundancy: actions involve repeated gestures, words, or sequences.
- Restricted range of themes: actions have to do with pollution and purification, danger and protection, possible danger of intrusion from other people, use of particular colours or numbers, construction of ordered environment.

Ritualized actions are not the only thing that takes place in rituals, and they may not fully explain why rituals are performed in the first place.⁴⁰ Yet Boyer and Liénard suggest that the compelling nature of ritualized actions is sufficiently explained by the existence of certain neuropsychological mechanisms. First, a precaution system is engaged. Human instincts are evolved to detect and deal with various kinds of dangers, but in order to be on the safe side there are also lots of false alarms. The precaution system involves thoughts about potential threats, which are inferred from clues in the environment, from information by other people, or self-generated. Such a state of arousal leads to an urge to do something; non-action is considered dangerous. Consequently, an action-parsing system is triggered: this is a special attentional state where actions are parsed into smaller units than more routine actions. Focusing on low-level parsing causes a load on the working memory, which pushes intrusive thoughts temporarily aside. After the performance, intrusive themes may again become salient and the action is repeated.

According to Boyer and Liénard, certain behaviours in cultural rituals trigger mental templates related to precaution and security systems. Rituals are successful since they provide a “cognitive capture” of these systems and feel attention-demanding and compelling. Ritualization is thus different from routinization, which is automatic and demands a low level of attention. Yet most rituals include both types of actions.⁴¹

³⁹ Pascal Boyer and Pierre Liénard, “Why Ritualized Behavior? Precaution Systems and Action Parsing in Developmental, Pathological and Cultural Rituals”, *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 29 (2006): 595–613. This research builds on the study of ritualized behaviors among obsessive-compulsive disorder patients, including both children and adults at certain life-stages when intrusive thoughts occur more frequently. See also the extensive and open peer commentary section in the same volume (pp. 613–650).

⁴⁰ Rituals are often considered as major contributors in the creation of social cohesion and distribution of common knowledge, for example. Research on *ritualized* actions embedded in rituals focuses on responses to perceived threats, but that does not mean that rituals in themselves in general cannot integrate other sorts of responses and a great variety of experiences.

⁴¹ Boyer and Liénard, “Why Ritualized Behavior? Precaution Systems and Action Parsing in Developmental, Pathological and Cultural Rituals”, 608–11.

As we do not have access to knowledge about what kind of ritual setting may have accompanied the use of a text like 4Q286, we must make suggestive inferences merely on the basis of the text. I am not suggesting that this text and its lists directly witness to ritualized behaviour. Rather, I am suggesting that, especially in suitable contexts where a social group is important and cultural information provides expectations about the ritual and its importance for protection or avoiding danger (such as falling on the side of the cursed ones), such lists may have provided an effective and attention-grabbing script to be followed, which was also found fitting for relieving experiences of anxiety or insecurity. In situations where there is a perception of an inferred (not manifest) threat but anxiety is not easily removed and there is no anticipation of a relief signal, mental systems seem to activate ritualized actions with their high level of control and explicit emphasis on proper performance.⁴²

Contemplation of aspects of the heavenly and earthly spheres could potentially achieve many things. The comprehensiveness of the lists captures one's attention, creating a sense that there is nothing in this cosmos that is outside of God's reality. This is an empowering feature, especially in the face of being oneself without power to influence things in the world. By listing everything there is, one may gain a feeling that there is control over everything. A list can also direct its reader's attention elsewhere: by focusing on the invisible heavens and visible earth, one can simply dismiss one's own position in the world and entertain the beauty and order of the world around oneself.

That things are not just said once but several times from slightly different angles in slightly different words helps one to get into the world of the list: it is not meant to be a minimal list, only mentioning things of the utmost importance or large categories. The list describing the heavens enjoys the beauty of majestic words and parallelism, whereas the list about the earth favours the whole and its structuring into parts. In whichever way one first understands the list, one may consequently come to think of new ways to understand it, learn to associate it with new intertexts, structure it differently, and focus attention on different terms than before. The lists do not have to be interpreted for their meaning; they can also be experienced by means of mental images and sense perceptions. The lists are good occupiers of working memory. If the list is understood to include items performing the purpose of creation (possibly in praise of God), it provided a ready template to imagine a force

⁴² Note the suggestion that scribes used lists as a trauma survival strategy in Roy Shasha, *The Forms and Functions of Lists in the Mishna*. PhD Dissertation (Manchester: University of Manchester, 2006), 20.

disseminated in the world, as the list proceeds and describes the way in which everything is made right. By seeing the world and all of its parts as consciously reflecting the wondrous order of God – and, even more, as praising God – people may have also seen the world in new ways outside the ritual setting. If something did not fit this order, that thing could potentially be placed among the items to be cursed.

Lastly, ritualized actions could also have made people more receptive to the authoritative teachings of a movement such as that in Qumran. Uffe Schjøedt, Jesper Sørensen and their colleagues present a model for analysing the cognitive effects of ritual actions. They suggest that three factors are often present in ritual settings that contribute to ritual participants being more susceptible to collective interpretations of ritual events and religious ideas; they all have to do with the overloading of the “executive system” of the brain: 1) high arousal but suppression of emotional expression, 2) goal demotion and causal opaqueness, and 3) presence of a charismatic authority.⁴³ Again, we cannot analyse the use of 4Q286 in a ritual setting, and we are not able to tell how emotionally arousing it may have been. There is no indication of a special authority figure like a priest pronouncing the lists. Nevertheless, the performed lists in 4Q286 represent actions which were distinct from everyday goal-oriented actions. If embedded in a ritual setting, at least implicitly meant to achieve protection for the created, harmonious order and avoidance of any disorder – praises could be seen as having this function, too – the lists together with the curses provided a mysterious way of achieving this goal. In the “resource model” by Schjøedt, Sørensen et al., exposure to goal-demoted actions and causal opaqueness consumes or seriously limits one’s capacity to form meaningful representations of actions, which in turn makes one more open to authoritative construction about the actions’ representation afterwards.⁴⁴

Conclusions

The lists in 4Q286 studied here (frags. 1 and 5) do not in themselves contain any singular mention of blessing or praising – which makes these lists all the more remarkable. It is possible that titles or introductory formulas were part of the lists, but not preserved. In a

⁴³ Uffe Schjøedt et al., “The Resource Model and the Principle of Predictive Coding: A Framework for Analyzing Proximate Effects of Ritual”, *Religion, Brain, and Behavior* 3, no. 1 (2013): 79–86.

⁴⁴ Schjøedt et al., “The Resource Model and the Principle of Predictive Coding: A Framework for Analyzing Proximate Effects of Ritual”, 44–45.

larger context, these lists have been seen as an odd pair to the curses.⁴⁵ Instead of covenantal blessings (and curses) and a priestly blessing on the people, the text (in fragments 1 ii–7 i) is most often interpreted as being about “blessings to God”. Praises to God and curses of Belial seem to have formed a common and fit counterpart at this time. Praising God was “a new form of benediction” in the sense that *this* was the means to protect oneself and provide what blessings were meant to provide.⁴⁶ Whether the lists in 4Q286 are to be understood as listing items of things or agents that praise God, or items performing the function for which they were created (and thus being blessed), or listing more abstract divine attributes, attempting to speak about God without directly speaking about him, or some combination of these, the most remarkable thing about the lists is that we do not have any one key to interpret them. The lack of syntax within the list and a (possible) lack of external rubrics demand its recipient to structure and explain it him/herself.

In the process of interpreting a list, first impressions easily influence one’s future perceptions about it. I explored the possibility of ordering the list in 4Q286 1 ii according to initial clusters, from spatial structures to visible and audible items, from items appealing to abilities of understanding and moral instincts to items experienced through time. My sub-ordering potentially influences my understanding of the list, even if it is exposed to other understandings. The overall scheme of the list is not clear. Could the order of items reflect the order of creation or ways in which God works in the world – from basic spatial structures to things being visible and heard, from things being known to things being performed at a correct time (as well as things mediated by angels, responsible for weather phenomena, etc.; cf. fragments 2 and 3)?

The other list studied here, 4Q286 5, is not as well preserved, and it is more difficult to determine to what extent it goes from larger general statements about the world and its inhabitants to more specific items, or if the list includes pairs of opposites or wholes and their parts (or both).

⁴⁵ See Bilhah Nitzan, “Blessings and Curses”, in *Encyclopedia of The Dead Sea Scrolls, Vol. 1* (ed. Lawrence H. Schiffman and James C. VanderKam; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 95–100.

⁴⁶ See Jeremy Penner, *Patterns of Daily Prayer in Second Temple Period Judaism* (Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 104; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 203, for the term תשבחות (also found in 4Q286 1 ii 5) being used to sing praises for exorcistic purposes. For blessings in general, see Jutta Jokiranta, “Towards a Cognitive Theory of Blessing: Dead Sea Scrolls as Test Case”, in *Functions of Psalms and Prayers in the Late Second Temple Period* (ed. Mika Pajunen and Jeremy Penner; Berlin: De Gruyter, forthcoming).

Performed lists can potentially do much more than what one might presume at the outset, when faced with a long list with little clues of its significance and meaning. I have suggested that more remains to be considered about the lists in 4Q286, not only in terms of blessings of some sort, but rather as representing media of meditation, including all things known, both factual and concrete and invisible and abstract, for comprehending what is important, and focusing on the perfection of the activity of listing itself as providing ways in which to cope with an imperfect reality. By employing the work on ritualized behaviour, I argued that such lists may trigger, in a suitable ritual and social setting, cognitive mechanisms related to danger and anxiety management. Ritualized actions are characterized by goal demotion, prescription, compulsion, and the desire to provide an ordered environment. Lists that were studied were potentially powerful means of occupying attention and directing one's perception; their understanding was also not exhausted by one reading or hearing. By occupying the user, the contemplation of such lists offered a dismissal of experiences of chaos and disorder and instead provided an experience of order, harmony, and control. By not being able to fully comprehend the lists, people may have become more receptive to the authoritative teaching in how to make sense of such experiences. In this way, this study hopes to contribute to an understanding of how the authority of a text such as 4Q286, as discussed by Brooke, could have been endorsed and acted on.

It is my great pleasure to dedicate this piece to Professor Brooke, who is an immense inspiration to me and my colleagues in Helsinki. The scope of his scholarship is enormous. Our experience is that his scholarly mindset always invites readers to explore new, creative and deep paths. His openness to new methodological approaches and his desire to tie biblical studies to the wider humanities set the model for others to follow.

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