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Abstract and Keywords

This article argues that wisdom in the Dead Sea Scrolls is not a continuation of the biblical Wisdom tradition. What we see in the scrolls is rather a reinterpretation of biblical Wisdom Literature within new conceptual frameworks and within the broader context of the interpretive culture of Second Temple Judaism. One of the main aspects of this new version of wisdom is that it is hidden and not available to just anyone. The emphasis on mystery and the hidden structures of time is shared by Wisdom texts from Qumran and from the Hellenistic world. Wisdom is omnipresent across Jewish traditions as it is integrated with Torah, revelation, and prayer. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has made clear how deeply embedded wisdom was across genres and traditions.

Keywords: wisdom, Dead Sea Scrolls, classification, ancient interpretation, wisdom and Torah, study, liturgy, mystery, Hellenistic period, multilingualism

THE topic of wisdom has become a major theme in Dead Sea Scrolls scholarship in the last two decades. This is mainly the result of the publication in the 1990s of a number of fragmentary texts from Qumran Cave 4 that share literary features with biblical Wisdom Literature and have for this reason been classified as sapiential texts in the editions and translations. However, even before the publication of the Cave 4 materials it was evident that Wisdom was an important category in the newly found compositions. Texts from Cave 1 such as the Rule of the Community (1QS) and the Thanksgiving Hymns (1QHᵃ) are replete with Wisdom terminology and have the highest esteem for the pursuit and attainment of knowledge. The main question is how to situate the various forms of wisdom we encounter in the Dead Sea Scrolls within the broader landscape of Judaism in the Hellenistic and early Roman periods.

Building on recent developments in scholarship, this article argues that the Qumran sapiential texts cannot be separated off from the broader corpus on account of their literary form. In order to better understand the intricate wisdom concepts that are being developed in these compositions, we have to study the multitude of fragmentary texts side by side without insisting on strict distinctions in terms of literary genre or provenance (i.e.,

sectarian vs. non-sectarian). This will lead to the observation that rather than continuing the biblical Wisdom tradition, texts found at Qumran perform a reinterpretation of Wisdom within the context of the broader intellectual culture of Judaism. To appreciate this wider framework of early Jewish interpretation, it is important to look across the linguistic boundaries of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Only by cultivating this broader outlook can we gain more clarity on the ways in which intellectual traditions from the Second Temple period reverberate in late antiquity.

(p. 142) 9.1 Questions of Classification

The discovery of Qumran texts that resemble biblical Wisdom Literature obviously raises the question of the relation between these two corpora. Are these texts really continuing the Wisdom tradition that we already encounter in books of the Hebrew Bible? In order to address this question, we have to take a closer look at issues of taxonomy, not only in terms of literary genre, but also regarding the supposed sectarian or non-sectarian provenance of the texts.

The editors of the Dead Sea Scrolls had to find ways of categorizing the newly discovered fragmentary manuscripts. The editors had to sort thousands of fragments and reconstruct manuscripts that included many texts that were previously unknown to modern scholars (Tigchelaar 2010). Evidently, when characterizing and labelling the texts, familiar categories, especially those deriving from form-critical scholarship of the Hebrew Bible, were used (Najman and Tigchelaar 2014). When it became clear that certain fragmentary texts shared formal features with compositions such as Proverbs, Job, Qohelet, and Ben Sira, it was only too natural to label these as Wisdom compositions. Nonetheless, it was also apparent that these works had features that did not fit within the traditional frame of Wisdom Literature.

The category of Wisdom Literature is a modern scholarly construct (Weeks 2016). Biblical scholars had developed this category on the basis of a set of characteristics shared by some texts in the Hebrew Bible: terminology related to wisdom and knowledge, literary forms associated with pedagogy, and a worldview that centered on the notion of a perfectly ordered creation. Texts that had been unearthed in Mesopotamia and Egypt made use of similar literary forms and presented a worldview and concepts that corresponded to those found in biblical Wisdom Literature. For this reason, scholars argued that these writings were part of an international literary tradition that functioned in the education of scribal elites. These basic parameters have been much discussed. It has proved difficult to clearly define criteria and delineate the corpus. Some scholars have even argued that the category of Wisdom Literature should be abandoned altogether (Kynes 2019).

The sapiential texts from Qumran further complicate the discussion on the category of Wisdom Literature. It is obvious that the biblical Wisdom books were considered of great importance by the authors of the Qumran texts: the typical terminology of biblical Wisdom is applied profusely and its literary forms are emulated. However, this terminology is imbued with meanings that are alien to classical Wisdom and, although we can recognize

aspects of a worldview that is focused on cosmic order, the conceptual framework in which these notions are embedded is rather different. Moreover, the literary genres associated with Wisdom Literature are mixed with genres known from other types of literature (Kister 2004).

The provenance of the Qumran sapiential texts is a matter of dispute, namely whether or not these texts were sectarian. The label "sectarian" here refers to texts that were (p. 143) composed by the communities that owned the Dead Sea Scrolls. The nature and structure of these communities, as well as their relation to the site of Qumran and the school of the Essenes, continue to be debated (Goodman 1995; Mason 2007; Collins 2010). But despite the lack of consensus and clarity, many scholars still presume that it is possible to differentiate between sectarian and non-sectarian texts and argue that the Wisdom texts from Qumran belong to the non-sectarian division. Other scholars claim that the same texts *are* sectarian. This bifurcation of views has led to an impasse in scholarship on Qumran Wisdom to the point that it is difficult to have a meaningful conversation between scholars working on either side of the fence, since they read the fragments in radically different ways.

When the fragments resembling biblical Wisdom were first studied, the Qumran-Essene hypothesis and the sectarian nature of the community were still largely taken for granted. John Strugnell, who was responsible for editing the largest and most widely attested Wisdom text found at Qumran (4QInstruction), assumed in an early publication that this text contained moral teachings of the Qumran sect (Strugnell et al. 1956). However, when he published the official edition of the 1Q and 4Q manuscripts of 4QInstruction, he had changed his view and claimed that this was a non-sectarian composition that was composed before the sect had been founded (Strugnell et al. 1999).

This reversal of opinion results from a major shift in the categorization of the Dead Sea Scrolls that began in the late 1970s (Newsom 1990; Dimant 2011; Tigchelaar 2012). In the early years after the discoveries, scholars generally assumed that all previously unknown texts were products of the Qumran community. But the gradual publication of new texts revealed a large variety among the compositions. Many of these texts did not display the sectarian markers that scholars had come to associate with the community's literary production. Since the biblical texts were obviously not composed by this community, why would there not be other (non-biblical) texts in their library that also had been composed by others?

The fragmentary Wisdom texts by and large do not employ terminology that refers to the communities of the Damascus Document and the Community Rule. Moreover, 4QInstruction, the most important of the Wisdom texts, gives advice on issues relating to property, marriage, and offspring. By contrast, the Community Rule describes how members renounce private property. The absence of women in the Rule has been taken by many scholars as an indication that the members were unmarried, just like the Essenes described by Philo and Josephus. For these reasons, it was argued that the sapiential texts from Qumran were not composed by the sectarian community, but were merely copied

and preserved as part of their library. These texts would then be the products of Wisdom teachers representing an ongoing sapiential tradition that was part of the "mainstream" intellectual world of Second Temple Judaism (Harrington 1996; Collins 1997; Goff 2007; Lange 2010; Kampen 2011).

Scholars arguing for the non-sectarian provenance of the Qumran Wisdom texts do recognize the shared terminology in sectarian texts such as the Rule of the Community and the Thanksgiving Hymns. This is usually explained as influence of the sapiential texts on the sectarian texts: the sectarian composers had 4QInstruction (p. 144) in their library and adopted its terms and concepts. The problem with this line of reasoning is that we have no way of proving that the sapiential texts were actually composed prior to the sectarian ones. The only argument for dating these compositions earlier is the assumption that they had not been written by the sect and must therefore have been written before its foundation. But there is no reason to exclude the possibility that the community adopted contemporaneous compositions from the outside. Moreover, our criteria are rather shaky. There is a significant degree of terminological overlap. Why could this vocabulary only be used to prove literary dependence and not shared provenance?

For precisely this reason, other scholars have argued that the sapiential texts from Qumran are literary products of the community. Both Devorah Dimant (2011) and Menahem Kister (2009) have pointed to a large number of distinctive phrases and concepts that are shared by the Qumran Wisdom texts and compositions that are typically associated with the community. In their judgment, the pervasive presence of sectarian vocabulary in the Wisdom texts indicates that these should indeed be regarded as sectarian. The divergent classifications of the Wisdom texts make discussion between scholars on either side of the divide difficult. Since context is so crucial for the interpretation of fragmentary texts, scholars who classify the Wisdom texts as sectarian are in some sense reading entirely different compositions than those scholars who classify the same texts as non-sectarian.

This impasse can be overcome by recognizing that the strict dichotomy of sectarian and non-sectarian compositions cannot ultimately be sustained, and is an obstacle to research that casts a wider net on Jewish Wisdom traditions in the Greco-Roman period. The absence of sectarian features in a text does not necessarily mean that it was written by a different group, since vocabulary and style can also be dictated by literary genre. Moreover, we can never be sure that the lost portions of a text did not contain sectarian features. But more fundamentally, there is a problem with our criteria and our categories. For in order to define which texts are sectarian and which texts are not, we need to have a clear notion of what we mean by "sectarian," what the sect looked like, and in which ways it deviated from other Jewish communities. Scholarship has no clarity on these issues at present. The publication of the entire corpus of the Dead Sea Scrolls is relatively recent and further research will certainly result in clearer answers to these questions. But if we impose preliminary distinctions on the corpus, we will continue to follow the circular paths that we have ourselves created.

9.2 Reinterpreting Wisdom

In order to understand the concept of wisdom in the Dead Sea Scrolls all texts should be studied in conjunction, whether they have been labelled as Wisdom compositions or not, and whether they have been classified as sectarian or non-sectarian. It is questionable whether the Qumran sapiential texts can be seen as representatives of an (p. 145) ongoing tradition of Wisdom Literature that is cultivated by circles of scribes. Rather, as Menahem Kister observes, "The continuity of the biblical wisdom tradition, often presumed because of the similarity in terminology or phraseology, is just as often an illusion" (Kister 2004, 19). What we see in the scrolls is rather a reinterpretation of biblical Wisdom Literature within new conceptual frameworks and within the broader context of the interpretive culture of Second Temple Judaism.

One of the main aspects of this new version of wisdom is that it is hidden and not available to everyone. Whereas in the book of Proverbs Lady Wisdom raises her voice and cries out by the city gates (Prov 8:1–3), the texts from Qumran tend to assume that wisdom is concealed and that only a select group of initiates have access. Throughout 4QInstruction the addressee is called a *mebin*, someone who understands, and is told: "your ear has been opened for the secret of being (*raz nihyeh*)." The meaning of the enigmatic phrase *raz nihyeh* is much disputed and will briefly be discussed below. But the elements of secrecy and the need of initiation are obvious and an important aspect of wisdom in the scrolls.

To a large extent this secret knowledge is focused on understanding the meaning of scriptures. This meaning is not accessible to just anyone who reads the text, but has to be teased out by the right person, within the right community, and with the right method. Wisdom consists in uncovering the "hidden things" (נסתרות) of the scriptures. The texts from Qumran are replete with references to biblical texts and allude to specific interpretations. This approach to interpreting the scriptures is very much in line with what James Kugel (1998) observed about interpretation in ancient Judaism more generally: the text is fundamentally regarded as cryptic and needs to decoded by the reader. This suggests that Wisdom features in the Dead Sea Scrolls may often attest to reinterpretation rather than to the continuation of a tradition.

A good example is the term *mebin*. The form occurs in Proverbs to describe someone who understands situations and has insight into wisdom teachings. The occurrence of this form in Proverbs may have influenced its usage in 4QInstruction but it is important to recognize the discontinuity in usage. In Proverbs the term never functions as a form of address for the disciple, while 4QInstruction consistently addresses its audience as *mebin*. How can this new usage of the term be explained?

In Proverbs we encounter the admonition, "And now, sons (בנים), listen to me." In fragmentary Qumran texts we find a remarkable variation on this form: "And now, understanding one/ones (*mebin/mebinim*), listen to me" (4Q303, 4Q525). The authors used the admonition from Proverbs, but interpreted the plural בנים not as "sons" but as a participle

of the verb בין, "to understand," and applied it in the *hifil* pattern (Kister 2000). The same twist occurs in a wordplay in Ben Sira: "Wisdom educates her sons (בניה) and she admonishes all those who understand her (מבינים בה)" (Sir 4:11). It seems that a similar reinterpretation of sapiential terminology lies behind the usage of *mebin* as a form of address in 4QInstruction. Throughout Proverbs the student of wisdom is addressed as son (בני, בנים). But 4QInstruction discerns a deeper meaning behind this trope: the student of wisdom is someone who understands secrets and mysteries (Bakker 2020).

(p. 146) The sapiential features of Qumran texts should be seen in the broader context of rewriting, interpreting, and emulating authoritative writings. The communities behind these manuscripts did not study the Wisdom books of the Bible separately, but in conjunction with other texts. This is precisely how Ben Sira describes the daily occupation of the sage:

> … who devotes his soul,
>   and who thinks about the Law of the Most High.
> He will seek out the wisdom of all the ancients,
>   and he will be occupied with prophecies.
> He will preserve the narrative of famous men,
>   and he will penetrate into the twists of illustrations.
> He will seek out the obscurities of proverbs,
>   and he will be engaged with the riddles of illustration.

(Sir 38:34–39:3, transl. Wright, NETS)

The pursuit of wisdom is not restricted to the study of proverbs and riddles, but is also directed towards prophecies and, most prominently, the Torah. The recycling and reinterpretation of terminology and literary forms from biblical Wisdom Literature should be seen in this context. In the course of the Second Temple period a collection of canonical writings emerged, and although this was not a closed canon, it is clear that these writings were held in reverence and were scrutinized. The content of wisdom is determined to a large extent by these writings, or more precisely, by the interpretation of these writings and the correct understanding of their hidden meaning. But it is important to emphasize that other books that never became part of the Bible were studied as well.

The Law of Moses obviously takes a central place in this interpretive enterprise. Ben Sira places the Torah at the top of his list of holy writings and elsewhere he famously states that all the fruits of wisdom are embedded "in the book of the covenant of the Most High, a Law that Moses commanded us" (Sir 24:23). There is an elaborate and ongoing discussion on the relationship between Wisdom and Law (Schipper and Teeter 2013). Many scholars argue that Torah became incorporated into Wisdom traditions. But Wisdom from the late Second Temple period cannot be separated from the broader interpretive culture and literary production of Judaism. In terms of authority, it is no doubt more correct to say that wisdom "is subsumed by Torah" (Tooman 2013, 227; cf. Kister 2004). But we should note that the processes of reinterpretation are reciprocal and that various forms of literature leave their mark on the ways in which the entire textual corpus is read.

The concept of Torah is extremely difficult to pin down and it is not clear to what extent "the Law of the Most High" or the "Law that Moses commanded us" are to be identified with the books of the Pentateuch, or with a more abstract notion of divine law (Levenson 1987). In order to get a better grasp of the entanglement of Torah and wisdom, it is helpful to examine the way in which both are intertwined with practice and observance. This is exemplified in a beautiful way in a passage that praises the wise with a series of beatitudes and concludes:

(p. 147)

> Happy is the man who has reached wisdom,
>   and walks in the law of the Most High,
>   and sets his heart to her ways.
> He controls himself in her punishments,
>   and always willingly accepts her afflictions.
> He does not forsake her in the distress of [his] cruci[ble],
>   and at the time of anguish he will not leave her.
> He does not forget her [on the day] of terror,
>   and in humbling himself, he will not despise her.
> Rather, he meditates on her continually,
>   and in his distress he speaks about [her].

   (4Q525 2 ii 3–6)

Wisdom and law are placed on an equal footing and the sage lives by their instructions. He is educated by holding fast to wisdom and any unfortunate events in his life are regarded as admonishment or trial. This implies that wisdom is not only seen as an object of knowledge, but also as an agent in the world: she inflicts suffering on the sage in order to train him and purify him, like metal in a crucible.

According to 4Q525 the sage constantly meditates on wisdom. There is a direct allusion here to Joshua 1:8, "This book of the Law shall not depart out of your mouth, you shall meditate on it day and night" (NRSV). This verse had a great impact and is also reflected in Psalm 1, Ben Sira 6, and the Rule of the Community (1QS VI 6). It is reused in a remarkable way in 4QInstruction, which tells the *mebin*:

> [Day] and night meditate on the mystery of being,
>   and study continuously
> And then you will know truth and iniquity,
>   wisdom and [foll]y you will un[dersta]nd.

   (4Q417 1 6–7)

The phrase "mystery of being" (*raz nihyeh*) occurs frequently in 4QInstruction and is also attested in the Rule of the Community and 4QMysteries. It is one of the most elusive concepts in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The allusion to Joshua 1:8 indicates that *raz nihyeh* relates to the Torah, and the same can be inferred from 4QInstruction's many allusions to the

Pentateuch, its discussion of legal matters (Schiffman 2004), and its reference to Mosaic revelation (4Q418 184 1).

The concept of the "mystery of being" is similar to the concept of wisdom in Proverbs and Job in the sense that it organizes the cosmos and society (Lange 1995). But there is a much stronger emphasis on temporality in *raz nihyeh*: it is the hidden force behind history and causes situations to develop and change both on a small scale and on a large scale. The use of various forms of the root היה ("to be," "to happen") in the Dead Sea Scrolls attests to an intricate reflection on the concept time and the phrase *raz nihyeh* could also be translated as the "secret of time" (Bakker 2021).

The *raz nihyeh* can be examined by studying the words of Moses and the prophets and by uncovering their hidden meaning. But other mantic techniques provide access to the mystery of being as well, especially astrology. More than once the *mebin* is told (p. 148) to study horoscopes in order to understand the hidden structures of social relationships (Morgenstern 2000; Schmidt 2006). The *raz nihyeh* is the hidden plan of God and allows insight into the divisions and workings of good and evil in the world. There is a close correspondence between the vocabulary and concepts in 4QInstruction and in the Treatise of the Two Spirits, in columns III and IV of 1QS (Lange 1995; Tigchelaar 2001). This indicates that the teachings of these texts are related and can be mutually illuminating. But *raz nihyeh* refers to a broader concept that encompasses all possible forms of knowledge.

The instructions to the *mebin* are repeatedly reinforced by the statement: "as He has opened your ear for the mystery of being." The teachings presented are accessible to someone who was given insight into heavenly mysteries. But this divine gift to the *mebin* does not release him from the obligation to acquire knowledge himself. To the contrary, throughout 4QInstruction the addressees are incited to study and gather knowledge, whatever the circumstances:

> If you are poor, do not say "I am poor so w[hy] should I study wisdom?"
> Bring your shoulder under all instruction,
>   and with every […] refine your mind,
>   and with abundance of insight your thoughts.
> Study the mystery of being,
>   and consider all the ways of truth,
>   and all the roots of iniquity you must contemplate.
> Then you will know what is bitter for a man,
>   and what is sweet for a person.

(4Q416 iii 12–15 *par* 4Q418 9+9a–c 13–16)

As in the passage from 4Q525 quoted above, the pursuit of wisdom is presented as a continuous exercise in which the sage is tested and in which his mind is purified. The command in Joshua 1:8 to meditate on the law day and night is taken literally and the students are admonished to study continuously, by day and by night. In another fragment from 4QInstruction the ideal of the uninterrupted pursuit of knowledge is exemplified by angels who chase after insight without ever becoming tired or hungry (4Q418 69 ii). The

students of wisdom are admonished to follow this example. The wisdom they pursue lies beyond the limits of human comprehension and for this reason they are required to transcend human limitations, such as the need for food and rest, in order to chase after knowledge continually. The pursuit of heavenly wisdom requires a transformation on the part of the sage in order to become more like the angelic example (Bakker 2016).

9.3 Wisdom and Prayer beyond the Hebrew-Greek Divide

Intellectual developments in the broader Greco-Roman world may cast light on some of the innovations in the concepts of wisdom we encounter in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Hindy Najman (2017) has pointed out that, while it is commonplace in scholarship to study (p. 149) parallels and direct points of contact between ancient Near Eastern Wisdom texts and biblical Wisdom, scholars have been much more reluctant to explore correspondences between the Dead Sea Scrolls and contemporaneous writings in Greek. This is surprising since these literatures were produced in chronological and geographical proximity, much closer, in fact, than the biblical and ancient Near Eastern Wisdom writings. There is abundant evidence of cultural contacts, including the Greek manuscripts discovered in the Qumran caves.

The Greek text Wisdom of Solomon is one of the most obvious points of departure in comparing Hebrew and Greek expressions of wisdom. Scholars generally date this text sometime between the early first century BCE and mid-first century CE and locate the composition in Egypt. Isaac Seeligmann (2002) has pointed to a number of close correspondences between Wisdom of Solomon and passages from the Dead Sea Scrolls, especially from the Hodayot. He highlights, for example, the language of mystery in the context of divine retribution (Wis 2:22), the notion that the sages share in the lot of the holy ones (Wis 5:5), and the dichotomy between human ignorance and heavenly knowledge, which can only be bridged by mediation of a divine spirit (Wis 9:13–18). These and other correspondences between the Qumran scrolls and passages from the Septuagint lead Seeligmann to the conclusion that there must have been contacts between sectarian circles in Judea and Jewish communities in Alexandria.

The similarities between Wisdom of Solomon's concept of wisdom and *raz nihyeh* are indeed striking. Both are presented as principles of retribution that ensure the reward of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked (Collins 2003). But the correspondences are even more intimate. Particularly striking is the emphasis on time and the knowledge of history, which is based on the correct interpretation of prophecies:

> And if anyone longs for wide experience, she knows the things of old and infers the things to come; she understands the subtleties of sayings and the solutions of riddles; she has foreknowledge of signs and wonders and the outcomes of seasons and times.

(Wis 8:8 NRSV)

The Greek composition describes wisdom as a spirit that permeates all of creation (7:22–8:1). She is not only an object of knowledge but also a force in the cosmos and an agent that drives history forward and guides events, for example the exodus from Egypt. Wisdom also has prophetic knowledge: she comprehends the things of old and the things to come (cf. 1Q27 1 i; Kister 2004, 32–33), she understands sayings and riddles, and foresees signs and wonders. All of this is remarkably similar to *raz nihyeh* in the Dead Sea Scrolls. But whereas Seeligmann regarded these as sectarian ideas that were transmitted from Judea to Egypt, current developments in research suggest a different model of explanation.

As I have argued in the first section, it is not so easy to draw a line between sectarian and non-sectarian texts from Qumran, and the idea that certain texts were written in an environment that might be called "sectarian" does not imply that ideas or practices of these communities were not shared along a broader basis in Judaism. Hindy Najman (2007) illustrates this point with respect to practices of prayer, divine (p. 150) inspiration, and philosophical contemplation. She places the writings of Philo of Alexandria alongside compositions that were found in Qumran and examines overlapping notions of revelation. She questions the strict distinctions that are generally drawn in scholarship between Jewish communities speaking Greek and Jewish communities speaking Hebrew and Aramaic, and she emphasizes multilingualism and the fact that Jews writing in different languages inhabited a shared world and inherited shared traditions and practices.

Najman demonstrates the sharing of traditions across Hebrew and Greek boundaries with the examples of ecstatic prayer among the Therapeutae in Egypt that can be compared to liturgical communion with angels in the writings from Qumran. Philo of Alexandria describes the Therapeutae as a community that has withdrawn to the countryside and lives a life entirely devoted to study and prayer. Once every fifty days they celebrate festivals at which they sing hymns of praise in perfect harmony while dancing throughout the night and experiencing mystic rapture. In a similar way, members of the *yahad* feel that they join the ranks of the angels in giving praise, and they experience heavenly light in their otherworldly worship. It has been pointed out that these themes in the Thanksgiving Hymns and the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice have echoes in liturgical and mystical traditions of late antique Judaism (Chazon 2000). If we find overlapping concepts in the Dead Sea Scrolls, in Philo of Alexandria, and in Judaism of the rabbinic period, it becomes very difficult to regard these as marginal and sectarian.

Although certain concepts and practices of wisdom may have been restricted to specific circles and communities, it is important not to lose sight of broader and overlapping structures that are embedded in processes of interpretation, textualization, and formation of liturgical traditions. A clear example of the intertwining of wisdom, Torah, the recitation of scriptures, and the performance of glorification is a text known as Psalm 154. This hymn has been preserved in translation in Syriac manuscripts and has also been discov-

ered at Qumran. In this text the revelation of Torah and wisdom have a clear pedagogical purpose:

> For wisdom was given to make the glory of the LORD known
> And to tell his great deeds, she was made known to humankind.
> To make simpletons know his might,
> and to instruct senseless people concerning his greatness.
> Those who are far away from her doors,
> those who are banished from her entries …
> From the gates of the righteous her voice is heard,
> and from the assembly of the pious her song.
> When they eat in abundance she is spoken of,
> and when they drink in community together.

> (11QPsalms[a] XVIII 3–6, 10–12)

The last verses emphasize the communal dimension: wisdom is present in the liturgical community, and the shared meals of the pious are the primary occasion for conversing about wisdom. There is an obvious parallel here with Mishnah Avot 3:3, which says (p. 151) that when three people are eating together and speak words of Torah, it is as if they were eating at the divine table (Kister 2009). The preservation of this hymn both in Qumran and in Syriac indicates the wider circulation of this text, despite arguments for its sectarian origin. The parallel in the Mishnah suggests a much broader liturgical context for the practice of devoting shared meals to conversations about wisdom and Torah.

9.4 Conclusion

The discussion on classifications of the Dead Sea Scrolls is based on the important insight that not all texts found at Qumran were composed by the same communities. At the same time, it should be recognized that it is extremely difficult to establish criteria for categorizing texts, especially when scholarly reconstructions of the communities behind these texts are still in a continuous state of flux. Taking into account that texts in the Qumran collections may have been written in distinct communities, it is nonetheless worthwhile to study the texts alongside each other.

The fragmentary state of most manuscripts implies that we need some kind of context for interpreting the fragments, and the presence of similar terminology across various compositions suggests they can cast light on one another. Additionally, the texts need to be placed in the broader landscape of Jewish literature from the period, of which most works that have been preserved are in Greek. The often-assumed dichotomy between Jewish writings in Greek and Hebrew, which partly originates in theological considerations, should be abandoned in order to make place for an approach that appreciates the different cultural contexts, but at the same time recognizes the shared practices of interpretation and explores the points of contact between distinct forms of literature.

The discovery of the scrolls made the world of ancient Jewish Wisdom a much larger world. We can see the omnipresence of Wisdom across Jewish traditions as it is integrated with Torah, revelation, and prayer. The emphasis on mystery and the hidden structures of time is shared by Wisdom texts from Qumran and from the Hellenistic world. Wisdom as a way of thinking permeates a variety of traditions across genres and opens up new pathways for what will emerge as Torah study and Jewish Law. These Wisdom tendencies are manifest across Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic traditions. One could not underestimate the centrality and importance of wisdom, both as a concept and as a reinterpreted tradition, as we have now learned from the discovery of the scrolls.

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