

Seek and Find. A Rereading of 4Q Sapiential Work (4Q185)

The object of this study is 4Q Sapiential Work (4Q185), a fragmentary manuscript which reveals Hebrew text in three columns. In the field of Qumran studies, there has long been and still remains a tendency to organise text into strict and often exclusive literary categories. This effort serves a meaningful purpose, but it can also subtly direct the reading of the text, as these categories equip the reader with assumptions that further shape the interpretations of it. The aim of this thesis is to reread 4Q185, and to do so with caution regarding the implications of its literary classification.

4Q185 was first published by Allegro in 1968 in the Discoveries in the Judean Desert of Jordan (DJDJ 5). Two years after the edition in DJDJ 5, John Strugnell published additional comments to supplement Allegro's reading. 4Q185 has always been classified as a sapiential text. It is a didactic speech with features commonly associated with wisdom literature. Until the present time, readings of 4Q185 give the impression that wisdom (חכמה) is a salient motif in the composition. Moreover, in recent scholarship on the wisdom literature, 4Q185 is presented as an example of the association of wisdom with Torah. When the text of 4Q185 provides the basis for such investigations, it requires a careful evaluation of both certain and non-certain readings.

This thesis offers a rereading of the manuscript and a thorough literary analysis of 4Q185. While 4Q185 generally is referred to as an instruction that promotes the acquisition of wisdom, this study argues that 4Q185 is an admonition that promotes humility and repentance in order to escape judgment and receive and do Torah.

My Approach

The overarching question for the present study is as follows: How can the literary contexts of the (Hebrew) Scriptures and the documents from Qumran shed light upon the admonition with regard to its genre, its function, and the role of wisdom and Torah?

The starting point of this study is the manuscript and all available photographs. In chapters 2–4, I offer a reading of the manuscript and provide a literary analysis. The transcription and translation provided in chapter two are the basis for a close reading (ch. 3) and a rhetorical analysis (ch. 4). In the literary analyses I explore the themes and motifs of the admonition, as they now fit together to inform the meaning and function of the whole

composition. In the close reading I approach each passage separately and follow the subsequent structure of the text, whereas in the rhetorical analysis I examine the internal dialogism and the persuasiveness of the admonition.

In chapters 5–7, I explore 4Q185 within a broader literary context. In chapter 5, I address recent research regarding the genre of 4Q185. I apply a prototype model of genre to discuss the relation to Proverbs in comparison with 4Q184 and 4Q525. These are compositions that, according to my judgment, have guided the interpretation of 4Q185. Next, I broaden this perspective in chapter 6 and examine the didactic function of 4Q185 in comparison with 4Q370 and the historical traditions in the Hebrew Bible. Finally, in chapter 7, I provide a literary comparison with the *Words of the Luminaries* (4Q504), a liturgical composition. The argument of this chapter is that 4Q185 adopts its strategies from the framework of the penitential prayers and addresses the current issues with corresponding strategies. In the final chapter (ch. 8) I summarise my findings.

Results

Through a critical examination of the manuscript and all available photos of 4Q185, I have provided new readings of the text. My reading weakens the direct link to חכמה and has an impact on the series of exhortations. Where Strugnell reads וּחַכְמוּ מִן [ג]בוֹרַת אֱלֹהִים, and translates “draw wisdom from the mighty Wisdom of God” (1 i 14), I suggest a new reading: וְהִכְנַעוּ מִן [ג]בוֹרַת אֱלֹהֵינוּ “humble yourselves before the [m]ight of our God” (i 14). I also suggest a different interpretation of the beatitudes in the second column and the surrounding text. Where Strugnell put wisdom and Torah in parentheses in the beatitudes, I suggest that we do not restore either. In col. ii 11, Strugnell restores text that again enhance the role of wisdom: “He redeems all his people, but he kills all those who hate [his Wi]sdom” (ii 11). This reading is not supported by the material data. My reading of the next line, וְהַלְלֵיהּ בָּהּ, “Those who [w]alk in it will inherit it” (ii 12), strengthens the impression of moral discourse and Torah obedience.

This study has shown that it is not the generic categorisation of 4Q185 as a wisdom text but the implications of this that are problematic. Repentance is part of the wisdom repertoire, and the humble ones who repent their sin lead a wise life. However, 4Q185 is not a wisdom discourse. There appears to be no discourse on Lady Wisdom or wisdom personified, and the antecedent of the feminine suffix is not necessarily חכמה. The admonition employs formal and rhetorical elements found in Proverbs, but one does not need חכמה “wisdom” in order to explain the contents.

In the study of 4Q185, the question of genre does not contribute to our understanding of the text, rather it appears to limit the reading by forcing an interpretative framework that affects our understanding of the text. 4Q185 reflects a devotion to piety and urges obedience of the law, but the Torah discourse in 4Q185 is not rooted in Proverbs. In this manner it deviates from the Qumran wisdom texts 4Q184 and 4Q525.

The established ideas of the wisdom genre has narrowed down the potential interpretations of 4Q185 and previous research has overlooked essential aspects in the speech. According to my analysis of 4Q185, the use of poetic imagery and historical motifs follows “judgment and restoration patterns” in the Hebrew Bible. The author of 4Q185 mediates tradition, and the themes of the speech are drawn from a broader pool than just wisdom literature. This selection of phraseology and motifs is a product of the creative mind of an author who plays with cultural heritage, but it is also a matter of exegetical work. When the author imitates patterns of motifs found in texts with penitential overtones, it is likely that this is a concern for the didacticism of the speech. The wisdom of 4Q185 is found within the stories of the Pentateuch and the prophetic homilies.