Esoteric wisdom texts from Qumran

George J. Brooke
The University of Manchester, UK

Abstract
The dominant approach to sapiential compositions found in the caves at and near Qumran has been based on traditional views of the wisdom books of the Hebrew Bible. The intention here is to look rather at the likely contexts of the transmission of the sapiential literature in the movement that preserved the Scrolls. In so doing, particular attention is given to esoteric writings. The first part of the paper outlines three key factors that indicate how a change of perspective might be justified and facilitated, namely views among biblical scholars that the overarching category of Wisdom Literature has lost much of its heuristic value, early Jewish views on evil and how to deal with it, and views on secrecy in early Judaism. The second major part is a brief consideration of sapiential compositions in the light of those key factors, suggesting a hierarchy of texts to match the social hierarchy and its accompanying hierarchy of knowledge for the group responsible for collecting the Scrolls in the caves at and near Qumran.

Keywords
4QInstruction, Qumran, treatise on the two spirits, wisdom literature

Introduction
This study aims to offer a slightly different perspective concerning sapiential compositions as found in the caves at and near Qumran. The dominant approach to such compositions has been controlled by traditional views of the wisdom books of the Hebrew Bible. The intention here is to look rather at the likely contexts of the transmission of the sapiential literature in the movement that preserved the Scrolls. In so doing, the paper will pay particular attention to so-called esoteric writings. The first part of the paper outlines three key factors that indicate how a change of perspective might be justified and facilitated, namely views among biblical scholars that the overarching category of Wisdom Literature has lost much of its heuristic value, early Jewish views on evil and how to deal with it, and views on secrecy in early Judaism. The second major part is a...
brief consideration of sapiential compositions in the light of those key factors, suggesting a hierarchy of texts to match the social hierarchy and its accompanying hierarchy of knowledge for the group responsible for collecting the Scrolls in those caves.

**Key factors in setting the scene**

The principal wisdom writings of the Hebrew Bible have commonly been construed as a literary corpus, variously associated with didactic settings, that is concerned first and foremost with correct social and individual behavior. Based on a widespread set of traditional observations of the world around and human activities in various contexts, sets of suitable behaviors are listed and encouraged through motivations construed as rewards, which often reflect one or more of family well-being, social prestige, financial security, and healthy longevity. Along the way, there is reflection on the vagaries of human nature and, notably in the Book of Job, the not altogether satisfactory analysis of the problem of the righteous person who suffers and, at least initially, does not seem to be suitably rewarded. There is also some delight in the personification of Wisdom as a force active in creative processes. James L. Crenshaw’s definition runs as follows:

formally, wisdom consists of proverbial sentence, or instruction, debate, intellectual reflection; thematically, wisdom comprises self-evident intuitions about mastering life for human betterment, gropings after life’s secrets with regard to innocent suffering, grappling with finitude, and quest for truth concealed in the created order and manifested in a feminine persona.1

While wisdom compositions in the Hebrew Bible are often associated with the growth of the scribal class, it is striking that in the collection of manuscripts deposited in the caves at and near Qumran by those with recognized priestly concerns and identities, there are many previously unknown Jewish wisdom compositions. Clearly, scribes and priests need not be mutually exclusive groups, though it is probably significant that the term “scribe” is rare in the nonscriptural compositions found in the caves, even though the movement’s leadership can be readily identified through a term associated with wisdom circles, namely maškil, as its root implies. It is now widely accepted that what can be broadly or loosely defined as wisdom compositions, including those found subsequently in the Hebrew Bible, were an integral part of the collection of Jewish literature deposited in the caves at and near Qumran. Some of the clearly sectarian works contain explicit appeals to such literature or have motifs from them woven into their very fabric. However, as the increasing number of wisdom compositions has been assessed, it is clear that such literature reflects several changes and developments. This essay is an attempt to offer some further consideration of such changes.2

The first stimulus for this study is somewhat broad. In recent years, in large part because of the rich evidence of the Dead Sea Scrolls, there has been some scholarly anxiety about

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1. James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (3rd ed.; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 12.
2. Some of the highly tentative character of the scholarship on wisdom in the Scrolls of the first four decades is described neatly by John Kampen, “Tôrah and Wisdom in the Rules Texts from Qumran,” in *Sacred Texts and Disparate Interpretations: Qumran Manuscripts Seventy Years Later* (ed. Henryk Drawnel; STDJ 133; Leiden: Brill, 2020), 316–20.
the continuing validity and usefulness of the category “Wisdom Literature,” especially as posited by Protestant scholars.\(^3\) Despite the possibility of seeing that such an overarching category could have many generic subcategories,\(^4\) there is increasing agreement that the rigid use of the label has outlived its purpose.\(^5\) Will Kynes has put it like this: “What has happened that ‘Wisdom Literature,’ so recently the belle of the biblical studies ball, should have the shimmering coach of scholarly enthusiasm transform into a rotting pumpkin beneath her?”\(^6\) He answers his own question by showing how the category emerged as an ideological response in mid-nineteenth century Germany and how recent genre theory has forced Biblical Studies to move beyond strict generic taxonomies. That move has been notably stimulated by the work of the SBL Wisdom and Apocalyptic section.

Categories such as “wisdom” or “sapiential” are not redundant, but need rethinking. The character of some of the material in Instruction and some other compositions has encouraged a significant revision of “wisdom” in early Judaism.\(^7\) Alongside the heretofore dominant horizontal view of the world (social mores), a vertical dimension has been introduced, and some knowledge has been recognized as derived from revelation.\(^8\) The adjustment in perspective is also suggestive of priestly interests, not least since the community’s tradition is that it was to the priest-Teacher that God “made known all the secrets of his servants the prophets” (1QpHab 7:4–5). Part of the appeal and success of the Teacher as a founding figure was his ability to hold various interest groups together,

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3. The general exclusion from the discussion of Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon is pointed out by Benjamin G. Wright, “The Pseudepigrapha within and without Biblical Studies,” in The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Fifty Years of the Pseudepigrapha Section at the SBL (ed. Matthias Henze and Liv Ingeborg Lied; SBLEJL 50; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2019), 135–36.
4. See the list of subgenres, from “Account” to “Woe Oracle,” in Roland E. Murphy, Wisdom Literature: Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Canticles, Ecclesiastes, and Esther (FOTL 13; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 172–85.
5. Will Kynes, “The ‘Wisdom Literature’ Category: An Obituary,” JTS 69 (2018): 1–24; Will Kynes, An Obituary for “Wisdom Literature”: The Birth, Death, and Intertextual Reintegration of a Biblical Corpus (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Mark R. Sneed, “‘Grasping after the Wind’: The Elusive Attempt to Define and Delimit Wisdom,” in Was There a Wisdom Tradition? New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Studies (ed. Mark R. Sneed; SBLAIL 23; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 39–67; or, with more nuance, Stuart Weeks, “Is ‘Wisdom Literature’ a Useful Category?” in Tracing Sapiential Traditions in Ancient Judaism (ed. Hindy Najman, Jean-Sébastien Rey, and Eibert J.C. Tigchelaar; JSJSup 174; Leiden: Brill, 2016), 3–23.
6. Kynes, An Obituary for “Wisdom Literature,” 2.
7. There are several monographs that have set out the new parameters for wisdom literature, among which are John J. Collins, Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age (OTL; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), and in relation to the Scrolls, Matthew J. Goff, Discerning Wisdom: The Sapiential Literature of the Dead Sea Scrolls (VTSup 116; Leiden: Brill, 2007). In Adams’ discussion of Jewish literature in Greek, the category of wisdom does not appear but some of its features are found in “Didactic Literature” and “Jewish Philosophical Treatises:” Sean A. Adams, Greek Genres and Jewish Authors: Negotiating Literary Culture in the Greco-Roman Era (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2020), 71–163.
8. Michael E. Stone, “Lists of Revealed Things in the Apocalyptic Literature,” in Magnalia Dei (ed. Frank Moore Cross, W. Lemke, and Patrick D. Miller; New York: Doubleday, 1976), 414–54; repr. in Michael E. Stone, Selected Studies in Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha with Special Reference to the Armenian Tradition (SVTP 9; Leiden: Brill, 1991), 379–418.
not least some priests and some transmitters of wisdom. Thus, just as temple concerns have now long been recognized in some forms of apocalyptic, so priestly issues are being articulated in relation to scribal wisdom circles. In addition, while much of the literature traditionally associated with wisdom has little sense of time as anything much more than seasonal change, by contrast some of the related compositions from the Qumran caves have a temporal or even an eschatological dimension. And it is important to draw out which compositions reflect which aspects of knowledge in a hierarchical secret group.

So, the second stimulus for this study engages with this shift from wisdom having to do predominantly with something social toward it also having to do with life in a world conceived in terms of divine purposes which seem to be constantly thwarted by human misbehavior. Thus, alongside the good and bad behaviors of social mores need to be set matters to do with sin and how it should be dealt with. Michael Stone has suggested that in the late Second Temple period there were two perceptions of the origin of evil, each being principally associated with one literary tradition. On the one hand, reflecting on Adam’s disobedience, there were those for whom evil was principally a matter of individual or collective wrongdoing, an internal personal or social affair, for which confession and repentance was necessary and, most significantly, some means of atonement. On the other hand, reflecting on demonic forces in traditions associated with Enoch, there were forms of evil which were largely external to the individual or group and from which protection was needed somehow. On some occasions, the external demonic forces could penetrate the individual or group and become internalized through some form of possession requiring exorcism, but for the most part various forms of adjuration could enable adequate protection.

9. George J. Brooke, “The Place of Wisdom in the Formation of the Movement behind the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in Goochem in Mokum: Papers on Biblical and Related Wisdom Read at the Fifteenth Joint Meeting of the Society for Old Testament Study and the Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap, Amsterdam, July 2012 (ed. George J. Brooke and Pierre Van Hecke, with the assistance of Bob Becking and Eibert J.C. Tigchelaar; OTS 68; Leiden: Brill, 2016), 20–33.
10. For a concise overview of the issues and a brief description of the minimum number of texts to be included in the discussion, see Matthew J. Goff, “Wisdom,” in T&T Clark Companion to the Dead Sea Scrolls (ed. George J. Brooke and Charlotte Hempel; London: T&T Clark, 2019), 449–56.
11. See, for example, Grant Macaskill, Revealed Wisdom and Inaugurated Eschatology in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity (JSJSup 115; Leiden: Brill, 2007).
12. See, for example, the valuable study by Charlotte Hempel, “Bildung und Wissenswirtschaft im Judentum zur Zeit des Zweiten Tempels,” in Was ist Bildung in der Vormoderne? (ed. Peter Gemeinhard; Studies in Education and Religion in Ancient and Pre-Modern History in the Mediterranean and Its Environs 4; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 229–44. Hempel distinguishes between knowledge for initiates, expert interpretative skills, and pseudo-knowledge, and uses modern ideas about the knowledge economy to categorize types of knowledge in the Scrolls.
13. Michael E. Stone, Ancient Judaism: New Visions and Views (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 31–58.
14. Enoch should also be associated with wisdom traditions: see, for example, Benjamin G. Wright, “Wisdom, Instruction, and Social Location in Ben Sira and 1 Enoch,” in Benjamin G. Wright, Praise Israel for Wisdom and Instruction: Essays on Ben Sira and Wisdom, the Letter of Aristeas and the Septuagint (JSJSup 131; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 149–54.
Stone’s perceptions of evil need to be set alongside the various forms of priestly self-understanding and practice in early Judaism. The two perceptions of evil seem to be represented in part by two priestly practices, namely, atoning sacrifice and knowledge of priestly lore. The two practices are not entirely distinct and do not belong exclusively to single developing forms of priesthood. However, on the one hand, traditions about repentance and the need for atoning sacrifice as laid out in much of Leviticus 1–7 provide the dominant role for the Aaronide priesthood. That is in part reflected in some Second Temple contexts by the sacrificial activities of Noah as mentioned in Gen 8:20–21 which in Jub 6:2–4 become explicitly a matter of atonement for all the sins of the earth. On the other hand, there is a tradition of specialist priestly books. This can be found notably in Aramaic compositions such as the Aramaic Levi Document 10:10: just before Levi is declared to be especially beloved, Jacob refers to what Abraham has found in “the writing of the book of Noah concerning the blood.” A similar reference is found in the Genesis Apocryphon 5:29: “[a copy of] the book of the words of Noah.” In the Testament of Qahat, Qahat is the transmitter of priestly lore from his father Levi to his son Amram; the inheritance is described as existing in “my books” (4Q542 2:12).

The Book of Jubilees seems to combine those Aramaic concerns with traditions in Hebrew to produce a hybrid perspective. In Jub 21:10 Abraham ends a list of sacrificial rules that he has given Isaac by saying, “Because thus I have found written in the books of my forefathers and in the words of Noah.” Such traditions are appropriately associated with Enoch, the first scribe, by James VanderKam, not least because the Enochic corpus contains books in which Noah is the subject. Overall, these books of Noah seem to have contained knowledge about his birth, about how sacrifices should be performed, about medicine, and about the control of demons. It can readily be asked what kind of wisdom such matters reflect. Such matters seem to be a combination of knowledge, some of it of a specialist kind, about the observable world, as might normally be construed within traditional wisdom categories, together with knowledge that has a more obvious cosmic dimension, whether in terms of the significance of sacrifice or the control of demons.

A third factor of influence also derives from Michael Stone, namely his ideas on secret groups in early Judaism. He has argued that little can ever be known about such groups unless one happens to come across their own literary remains in caves. Nevertheless, he configures the group responsible for the deposits of manuscripts in the

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15. See George J. Brooke, “Patterns of Priesthood, Priestliness and Priestly Functions in Second Temple Period Texts,” Œuvre de la Bible ancienne – Ancient Judaism 4 (2016): 1–21, where this is developed more fully.
16. Cf. 1QapGen 10:12–15 where, in a fragmentary context, Noah claims “I atoned for all the whole earth.”
17. This is ambiguous: was the book solely about blood or simply with one part concerned with blood?
18. Cf. Jub. 10:13–14. Translations of Jubilees here are by Orval S. Wintemute in OTP II.
19. James C. VanderKam, Jubilees 1: A Commentary on the Book of Jubilees Chapters 1–21, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018), 408–409; on Enoch as writer he cites Jub. 4:17–19, 21.
20. 1 Enoch 106–107 (on the birth of Noah); cf. the so-called Book of Noah (1Q19).
21. Michael E. Stone, Secret Groups in Ancient Judaism (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).
caves at and near Qumran as by default the most significant example of such a secret group in two key respects. First, admission is strictly limited and controlled, with new adherents inducted “by gradual revelation of the group’s secret teachings and practices.” Second, the group had a strict hierarchy so that one’s status in the group “determined how much of the group’s secret practice and teaching was revealed to each member . . . Only the preeminent leader and teacher of the group, called the maškil at Qumran, was privy to the greatest secrets.”22 So, rather than working with categories of sectarian and nonsectarian, Stone prefers to approach the group compositions from the Qumran caves in terms of open and secret or exoteric and esoteric.23

By esoteric Stone helpfully indicates that he means to include any knowledge that purports to be secret, even such things as “the details of how to make incense or the shewbread, which are known and transmitted only to members of a specific familial group.”24 In delineating how secrets might be transmitted in limited circles, Stone mentions “books, traditions, ideas, and practices,” giving priority to written texts, and he argues that the Qumran covenanters were such a group dedicated to “the preservation, cherishing, and transmission of the corpus of special knowledge.”25 Questions remain concerning what more precisely might constitute such secret knowledge and whether it might reflect some kind of hierarchy of knowledge and specialist skills available only to particular group members. There is also a wider question of whether such knowledge deserves the “wisdom” label; however, given that the special knowledge is to a large extent gained through revelation and taught by a maškil, a redefined category of wisdom would seem to work well as describing a set of discourses that gather together a constellation of ideas and themes.26

Let me assemble these three factors together in summary form. First, it now seems appropriate not to restrict the category of “wisdom” to a rather narrowly defined set of didactic literature concerning social mores; rather there are a range of literary traditions that variously reflect Jewish insight into the ways and workings of the cosmos, a wide range of knowledge which extends well beyond a concern with the social. Second, at least some of that knowledge, especially book knowledge, as manifest to us now in the compositions that have come from the caves at and near Qumran can be associated with a

22. Stone, Secret Groups in Ancient Judaism, 5.
23. The long view of the esoteric, particularly as confined to scribal groups, is represented, for example, in Alan Lenzi, Secrecy and the Gods: Secret Knowledge in Ancient Mesopotamia and Biblical Israel (State Archives of Assyria Studies 19; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2008).
24. Stone, Secret Groups in Ancient Judaism, 14.
25. Stone, Secret Groups in Ancient Judaism, 23. Stone describes the place of books in the transmission of knowledge in secret groups, and even among the not so secret, noting the place of writings among the Essenes described by Josephus in J.W. 2:142 (Secret Groups in Ancient Judaism, 38), that the Therapeutae according to Philo (Contempl. 29) had secret books (Secret Books in Ancient Judaism, 74–75), and that 4 Ezra 14:45–47 enumerates seventy restricted books “for in them are the springs of understanding, the fountains of wisdom and the river of knowledge” (Secret Groups in Ancient Judaism, 104).
26. For this see the significant proposal of Hindy Najman, “Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Period: Towards the Study of a Semantic Constellation,” in Is There a Text in This Cave? Studies in the Textuality of the Dead Sea Scrolls in Honour of George J. Brooke (ed. Ariel Feldman, Maria Cioată, and Charlotte Hempel; STDJ 119; Leiden: Brill, 2017), 459–72.
group which had a fundamental ethos of secrecy that reflected its own hierarchical structures. Third, within the group reflected in the Qumran corpus at least some place must be given to the books associated with priests and priestly practices, some of which were perceived to go back especially through Aramaic traditions to much earlier generations whose ideology the group probably claimed to represent. With such a picture in mind a few observations can be made about those compositions from the caves at and near Qumran which have been considered sapiential.

**Categories of wisdom and the place of esoterica**

The hierarchical organization of the movement which describes itself as the *yahad* in some texts and as those who have entered a new covenant in other texts implies that there were degrees of membership, methods of assessing rank at various stages, and practices that reflected the suitable ordering of gathered groups, especially for meals. Let us think of three levels within the structure: first, those recently initiated; second, those who had been members for some time; and third, those of an inner council who might belong to the core group around the *maskil* who at an early stage in the movement’s life might also have been the Teacher of Righteousness. This esoteric movement represented in the compositions from the caves at and near Qumran also has a priestly character, even if after a while there were not so many actual priests involved.27 The movement had an interest in the incorporation of sapiential traditions within a priestly ambit as variously represented in several compositions, an interest in the sacralization of wisdom, if not more precisely in the sacerdotalization of wisdom.28

**Knowledge for a new member**

Several compositions have been associated with the instruction of new members. An indication of the kind of thing to be given attention features in the Rule of the Congregation (1QSa) which as an appendix to 1QS can be suitably read as describing what might be taking place in the community through the literary fiction of depicting eschatological Israel. Such an eschatological Israel would only be made up of those committed to the movement as depicted in the composition. 1QSa 1:4–5 reads,

> When they come, they shall assemble all those who come, including children and women, and they shall read into [their] ea[rs] [a]ll the precepts of the covenant, and shall instruct them in all their regulations, so that they do not stray in [the]ir c[errs].29

27. On the probable democratization of the movement, see, for example, George J. Brooke, “From ‘Assembly of Supreme Holiness for Aaron’ to ‘Sanctuary of Adam’: the Laicization of Temple Ideology in the Qumran Scrolls and its Wider Implications,” *Journal for Semitics* 8, no. 2 (1996): 119–45.

28. On the presence of traditional sapiential material in some key compositions, see, for example, Kampen, “*Tôrah* and Wisdom in the Rules Texts from Qumran,” 325–32; Katri Antin, “Transmission of Divine Knowledge in the Sapiential Thanksgiving Psalms from Qumran” (Ph.D. diss., University of Helsinki, 2019).

29. Trans. Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J.C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1.101.
Lawrence Schiffman has written,

This covenant renewal ceremony, like those described in the Bible (Deuteronomy 29–31; Joshua 24; 2 Kings 23; and Nehemiah 9–10), would be an opportunity for the teaching of the Torah and its regulations. Since the term mšpṭym denotes law as derived by the sectarian system of biblical exegesis, we can safely conclude that the purpose of this ceremony will be much more than simply teaching the written Scriptures of the Jewish people. This occasion would entail the detailed instruction of the many new sectarians . . . in the true interpretations of the Qumran community.30

The very next section of the Rule of the Congregation indicates what might be studied. The young man is taught the book of Hagy, and according to his age he is instructed in the precepts of the covenant (hwqy hbryt) and their regulations (mšptyhmh). For 10 years he is counted among the children. Many have been the interpretations of the Book of Hagy. The likely majority view is that the Book of Hagu/y is to be identified on linguistic and textual grounds with the Torah, and the regulations here probably refers to the practical application of the commandments . . . in accord with his demonstrated aptitudes and progress, the young boy would be taught sectarian regulations, believed by the sect to be the result of inspired biblical exegesis. These teachings are reserved for a later stage than that at which the teaching of the Torah and the commandments is introduced.31

An alternative minority view is that of Jonathan Ben-Dov who reckons that the content of the Book of Hagy is unknowable; rather “the root HGY carries special connotation with regard to the pedagogical process.”32 Overall, both content and process were probably referred to: the youth had to learn methods of exegesis and the correct interpretations of the Torah (cf. CD 3:12–20), just as also the priest in the community was expected both to know the text intimately, perhaps by heart, but also its community interpretation.

Since Instruction does not appear to be a narrowly sectarian composition, but is nevertheless extant in several copies in the caves at and near Qumran, it is likely to have been familiar to those joining the community or to those not yet full members. Nevertheless, one of the frustrations in reading Instruction is that the wisdom teaching it contains refers in many instances to the raz nihyeh, but the mystery or secret is never described in detail. This strongly suggests that the work, likely in any case to be a pre- or nonsectarian composition, had some role either in convincing enquirers to join or was part of a curriculum of study in the early stages of life among the covenanters. The lack of precise

30. Lawrence H. Schiffman, The Eschatological Community of the Dead Sea Scrolls: A Study of the Rule of the Congregation (SBLMS38; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 13.
31. Schiffman, The Eschatological Community of the Dead Sea Scrolls, 15 (and n. 29), likens this to the rabbinic usage “in which the extrabiblical traditions of the rabbis, the oral law in the form of the Mishnah, are reserved for a later age than is the teaching of Scripture” (cf. m. ’Abot 5:21).
32. Jonathan Ben-Dov, “The Book of HGY and Ancient Reading Practices,” in Is There a Text in This Cave? Studies in the Textuality of the Dead Sea Scrolls in Honour of George J. Brooke (ed. Ariel Feldman, Maria Cioatâ, and Charlotte Hempel; STDJ 119; Leiden: Brill, 2017), 423–37.
information about the *raz nihyeh* would entice novices to seek for more. The number of copies of Instruction that survive seems to indicate that it was indeed used within the community at Qumran and probably also in the wider movement of which it was a part.

**Knowledge for a full member of the movement**

Once again, we can turn to the Rule of the Congregation. There seems to be a two-stage process for those who have grown up in the movement, and perhaps such was also mirrored in some way for others joining at any time of life. First, there was a 5-year period from the age of 20 when the youth became enrolled: he could “join the holy community” (*lyḥd b’dt qwdš*). And at that point he could also marry. Then, at the age of 25 he could take his place to perform liturgical service. It seems likely that the age is taken over from Num 8:24 where 25 is specified as the minimum age for Levitical service, a point that might be significant for the kinds of knowledge and further education that could then be received. At the age of 30 he could graduate to take on the role of judge within the community.

Various compositions and their wisdom elements might be taken to belong to the initial 5-year stage or even thereafter. Alongside Instruction itself, the so-called Treatise on the Two Spirits might have functioned as a separate element of core curriculum for the newly enrolled. In its version in the Cave 1 Rule of the Community it begins with an assertion about the “God of knowledge.” If the poem at the end of the same manuscript was known to the initiate at an early stage in his covenantal career, as could be implied by the existence of the poem apparently as free-standing in 4QS₁, then he would discern that the *rz nhyh* is known to the *maškil*:

As for me, to God belongs my judgment; in his hand is the perfection of my behaviour with the uprightness of my heart; and with his just acts he cancels my iniquities. For from the source of his knowledge he has disclosed his light, and my eyes have observed his wonders, and the light of my heart the mystery of existence (*rz nhyh*). (1QS 10:2–4)

The Hodayot also attempt to construct the self of those who recite them. In a poem such as the psalm for the *maškil* (1QHa 5:12–6:41), within the context of the blessing of the Lord, the person who prays the psalm acknowledges that he is instructed in “the mysteries of the plan” (1QHa 5:17: *rzy mḥšbt*), is aware of the wonderful mysteries (1QHa 5:19: *rzy pl’*), and knows about the “mysteries of your understanding” (1QHa 5:30: *rzy šklka*). Although the covenanter taught through Instruction might remain unaware of the content of the singular *rz nhyh*, the person praying the blessing of God in the Hodayah is inculcated into recognizing some pluralised divine mysteries in plans,

33. See Arjen Bakker, “The God of Knowledge: Qumran Reflections on Divine Prescience Based on 1 Sam 2:3,” RevQ 26, no. 103 (2014): 361–74.
34. Trans. García Martínez and Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, 1.97.
35. Carol Newsom, *The Self as Symbolic Space: Constructing Identity and Community at Qumran* (STDJ 52; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 191–286.
36. I am indebted here to the insights of Michael B. Johnson, “David’s Prayer and the Maskil’s Psalm: Some Observations on a Common Rhetorical Strategy in 1 Chr 29:10-20 and 1QHa 5:12–6:33” (presented at SBL November 2019).
wonders, and understanding, all of which reveal divine glory. This is wisdom experienced through blessing as spiritual insight, rather than wisdom taught as a set of moral principles derived from human observation of the world around and its inhabitants.

**Knowledge for an inner circle around the maśkil**

Various items of technical knowledge might have been restricted to the inner circle around the maśkil, perhaps designated as the council of the community. There are seven categories of esoteric material, though there are some overlaps between them and others might also be named. Most of the compositions reverberate with the concerns of wisdom broadly conceived as defined in the first part of this paper.

First are those sapiential texts most commonly identified as esoteric in some way, perhaps as a whole, as with Mysteries, or in part, as with the rz nhyh in Instruction and other compositions. Some knowledge is construed as esoteric. More could be said, but such esoterica have been discussed extensively by others, especially Samuel Thomas.37 Although much in a composition such as Instruction seems to concern everyday human interactions, not least concerning money, its frequent mention of the rz nhyh indicates its concern to encourage its readers to think beyond social mores.

Second, among such items, perhaps with particular priestly interests, are compositions with carefully calculated views on time.38 The calendars from Cave 4 have contributed to Charlotte Hempel wondering whether Cave 4 was in part a working repository for the elite in the movement.39 The range of calendric compositions is intriguing, suggesting that some experts had interests in comparing possibilities. And 4Q318 with its zodiac sele-nodrome and brontologion would seem to indicate a combination of skills and expertise.

Third, other scientific concerns of the Hellenistic world might also have been part of the esoterica of an inner circle.40 Among such matters might be maps and medicine, plant science, and physiognomy. All can be found in the compositions found in the caves at and near Qumran or through analysis of some of the remains at the site. The map of Jubilees 8–10 which envisions the world in three sectors according to the descendants of Noah could reflect knowledge of earlier Ionian world maps.41 Medicinal knowledge upon which the priests were supposed to make declarations is evident in several places, notably parts of the Damascus Document. There is also evidence for the application of medicinal treatments and procedures in the cemetery with the use of madder and

37. Samuel I. Thomas, *The “Mysteries” of Qumran: Mystery, Secrecy, and Esotericism in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (SBLEJL 25; Atlanta: SBL, 2009).
38. For the broader context see the essays in Jonathan Ben-Dov and Lutz Doering, eds., *The Construction of Time in Antiquity: Ritual, Art, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
39. Charlotte Hempel, *Qumran Rule Texts in Context: Collected Studies* (TSAJ 154; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 303–37.
40. See the collected studies, nearly all of which engage with compositions found inter alia in the Qumran caves, in Jonathan Ben-Dov and Seth Sanders, eds., *Ancient Jewish Sciences and the History of Knowledge in Second Temple Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).
41. See, for example, Philip S. Alexander, “Early Jewish Geography,” *ABD* 2.980–82.
trepanning. The site provides evidence of plant science through what seem to be bal-
samic perfume jars. And the science of physiognomy forms the basis of such composi-
tions as 4Q186.42

Fourth, there is mantic wisdom or divination. James VanderKam has argued that among the compositions in the Qumran caves with a divinatory purpose might be placed the same 4Q186, 4Q561 (an Aramaic Horoscope), the already-mentioned 4Q318 (Zodiac and Brontologion), and 4Q534 (Aramaic Elect of God text). He remained very cautious about reconstructing the function of such texts, though a divinatory context seems plausible. In addition, VanderKam proposed that dreams and their interpretation should be included in this category. There are multiple references to such phenomena in the Enoch literature, the Book of Jubilees, and in several other places, such as the Genesis Apocryphon. Although those texts are probably not sectarian in origin, they indicate interest among some in the movement with such things. Who might be permitted to have such interests? Probably the elite in the movement, since the dream interpretation in Daniel material might be transmitted by maškilim and the similar attitude to the inter-
pretation of prophecy (especially in the pesharim) is associated in the memory of the movement with the Teacher of Righteousness.44 An overall long view of mantic wisdom has been offered by Gideon Bohak.45

Fifth, there are various items of performative ritual speech. Among these more gener-
ally are all kinds of blessing and curse, both of which are associated variously with priests and Levites in the ritual described in the Cave 1 version of the Rule of the Community. The exorcistic or apotropaic purposes of texts such as the Songs of the Sage (4Q510–511) and the so-called Apocryphal Psalms (11Q11), sometimes linked to discussions of magic in the movement, seem to be close to what was assigned to Noah according to Jubilees 10 in relation to healing and protection from the demonic. The correct recitation of the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice with their reflection of cosmic knowledge might also belong in this category.

Sixth, Charlotte Hempel has also suggested that “a consideration that has not received sufficient attention to date is that the scholarly mind-set applies as much to the produc-
tion of literary texts, including the Rules, as it does to the collection and ownership of such material.”46 Perhaps the production of several manuscripts was of particular special-

### Footnotes

42. See Mladen Popović, *Reading the Human Body: Physiognomics and Astrology in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Hellenistic-Early Roman Period Judaism* (STDJ 67; Leiden: Brill, 2007); Mladen Popović, “4Q186. 4QZodiacal Physiognomy: A Full Edition,” in *The Mermaid and the Partridge: Essays from the Copenhagen Conference on Revising Texts from Cave Four* (ed. George J. Brooke and Jesper Høgenhaven; STDJ 96; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 221–58.
43. James C. VanderKam, “Mantic Wisdom in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *DSD* 4 (1997): 336–53.
44. On the place of prophecy and divinatory interpretation in the movement behind the Scrolls, see the important essays by Martti Nissinen, *Prophetic Divination: Essays in Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy* (BZAW 494; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), 631–80.
45. Gideon Bohak, “Manuals of Mantic Wisdom: From the Dead Sea Scrolls to the Cairo Genizah,” in *Tracing Sapiential Traditions in Ancient Judaism* (ed. Hindy Najman, Jean-Sébastien Rey and Eibert J.C. Tigchelaar; JSJSup 174; Leiden: Brill, 2016), 191–216.
46. Charlotte Hempel, “Reflections on Literacy, Textuality, and Community in the Qumran Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Is There a Text in This Cave? Studies in the Textuality of the Dead Sea Scrolls*
minority interest. I think especially of the production of tefillin and mezuzot. Also to be mentioned are various amulets. A while ago I suggested that 4Q341 might have been a writing exercise for those few expert scribes who might be trained in the production of such manuscripts; my suggestion has been qualified extensively and convincingly by Joan Taylor.

Seventh, another set of compositions requiring some specialized production are those manuscripts penned in cryptic alphabets, known as A and B. Some of these compositions are known in regular script, such as the Rule of the Congregation, and several are not, such as the Words of the Maskil to the Sons of Dawn (4Q298), so in a few instances there are overlaps with the categories already mentioned. Two manuscripts were provided in new editions in 2017 by the Haifa team. The first is an edition of 14 fragments in Cryptic A script reconstructed as a single copy of the Rule of the Congregation, 4Q249a pap cryptA Serekh haEdah (4QSE). The second is a reconstruction of a set of fragments not previously edited, 4Q324d, also in Cryptic A script: 42 fragments have been placed to make a continuous text, a calendar which resembles the one found at the top of one copy of MMT (4Q394 3–7). 4Q324d contains an interlinear gloss concerning the wood offering, a topic hinted at in scripture but developed in the Temple Scroll. Why the use of such scripts? It seems likely that the texts, whether otherwise known or not, were indeed being kept secret from someone. And the association of some of these compositions with the maškil would put them close to the top of the community’s hierarchy.

Those seven kinds of esoteric text, many with sapiential elements that are about the accurate observation of the world and its inhabitants as individuals and as groups, should be set alongside all those compositions which display the exegetical skills and insights of the wise interpreter, the one through whom God makes known the nistarot, the hidden things, or through whom God makes known all the mysteries of his

in Honour of George J. Brooke (ed. Ariel Feldman, Maria Cioată, and Charlotte Hempel; STDJ 119; Leiden: Brill, 2017), 68–82 (77).

47. See, especially, Yehudah B. Cohn, Tangled up in Text: Tefillin and the Ancient World (BJS 351; Providence: Brown University, 2008).

48. Ariel and Faina Feldman, “4Q147: An Amulet?” DSD 26 (2019): 1–29; Ariel and Faina Feldman, “4Q418 (4QPhylactère U): Another Amulet from Qumran?” JSJ 50 (2019): 197–222; Ariel and Faina Feldman, “Is Mur 5 a Mezuzah?” RevQ 31, no. 114 (2019): 291–98.

49. George J. Brooke, “4Q341: An Exercise for Spelling and for Spells?” in Writing and Ancient Near Eastern Society: Papers in Honour of Alan R. Millard (ed. Piotr Bienowski, Christopher B. Mee, and E.A. Slater; LHBOTS 426; London: T & T Clark International, 2005), 271–82; Joan E. Taylor, “4Q341: A Writing Exercise Remembered,” in Is There a Text in This Cave? Studies in the Textuality of the Dead Sea Scrolls in Honour of George J. Brooke (ed. Ariel Feldman, Maria Cioată, and Charlotte Hempel; STDJ 119; Leiden: Brill, 2017), 133–51.

50. Antony Perrot, “The Rise and Fall of Cryptic C: 4Q363a as a Manuscript Written Entirely in Paleo-Hebrew” (SBL Meeting, San Diego 2019), showed convincingly that the letter forms of 4Q363a, supposedly in a Cryptic C alphabet, could all be shown to be forms of paleo-Hebrew.

51. Jonathan Ben-Dov, Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, and Asaf Gayer, “Reconstruction of a Single Copy of the Qumran Cave 4 Cryptic-Script Serekh haEdah,” RevQ 29, no. 109 (2017): 21–77.

52. Eshbal Ratzon and Jonathan Ben-Dov, “A Newly Reconstructed Calendrical Scroll in Cryptic Script,” JBL 136 (2017): 905–36.
servants the prophets. Such exegetical skills are apparent not just in the way a scriptural or authoritative text is made to resonate with meaning for the community, but also in how prayers are compiled through the anthologization of scripture and blessings and curses are composed which when performed protect the community and its individual members.53

Sidnie White Crawford has recently acknowledged the place of esoteric texts in the collection of compositions coming from the Qumran caves but she puts these matters on the margins of the community.54 Although it is dangerous to extrapolate from the evidence of the caves, it could be that the fewer the manuscript copies of some texts, the fewer texts in some categories, the more likely that they could have belonged in the category of priestly esoterica. Those compositions extant in more copies probably had a wider readership, even though that might have been restricted in some way within the sectarian movement. Several of the topics contained in these seven overlapping categories either have links with the leadership of the movement, notably the maṣkil, or reflect priestly expertise. Several of those works might have been part of the priestly book tradition as described in some texts for earlier generations. The list presented here seems to be a mixture without much coherence, but it could be that overall those compositions, some with a priestly outlook, some associated with the maṣkil, some linked with books of priestly lore, provide us with something more emic for understanding how a group concerned with secrecy might have actually lived and worked than can be derived straightforwardly from wisdom categories imposed on various compositions by the descriptive analysis of biblical scholars.

Implications

I have suggested here that the search for knowledge and understanding as disclosed in a wide range of compositions that have come from the caves at and near Qumran indicates several things. First, “wisdom literature” has indeed been construed in too narrow a fashion in relation to the literary developments among Jews in the Second Temple period; where once literary genre alone seemed to be a suitable basis for grouping compositions, in the light of the evidence from the Qumran caves (and indeed elsewhere) varieties of discourse can be deemed sapiential with revelation and eschatology playing significant roles alongside human observation. Second, in all things there needs to be consideration of the curriculum and pedagogical methods: at a basic level, observations of human nature and the world around are variously related to inherited and developing traditions of other sorts about how Jewish communities might lead their lives. Third, the community context of the search for knowledge and understanding gives a setting for appreciating that just as the members of the community were organized in a strict hierarchy so were the varieties of knowledge, with the most esoteric reserved in most

53. Perhaps a particular understanding of creation underpins such scriptural reworkings in blessings and curses: see, Mika S. Pajunen, “Creation as the Liturgical Nexus of the Blessings and Curses in 4QBerakhot,” in Ancient Readers and their Scriptures: Engaging the Hebrew Bible in Early Judaism and Christianity (ed. Garrick V. Allen and John Anthony Donne; AJEC 107; Leiden: Brill, 2019), 27–39.

54. Sidnie White Crawford, Scribes and Scrolls at Qumran (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 248–52.
cases for those at the apex of the hierarchy, many of whom were of priestly pedigree. Trying to arrange the hierarchy of knowledge for the community remains an ongoing affair. In addition, much more attention needs to be paid to how the use of the differing genres of material functioned in enabling a community member to progress from one level in the hierarchy to another.

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