CHAPTER 2

4QBrontologion: Transmission, Origins and Significance

2.1 Introduction

There are no other brontologia in the Dead Sea Scrolls, nor are any other thunder omen texts attested in Aramaic from this time period. Hence, in terms of its language and provenience 4QBrontologion is unique, although its content and archaic literary style is similar to Akkadian and Babylonian omen texts and to Byzantine sources in Greek. The outstanding questions surrounding 4Q318 are whether its origins are Mesopotamian or Hellenistic. It is the only known West Semitic link between the Byzantine Greek brontologia (and selenodromia or zodiac calendars) and parallel Mesopotamian material.

The brontologion is written in the standard Mesopotamian omen style of beginning with a conditional clause about the natural world followed by its interpretation in the earthly environment, a formula known as an protasis-apodosis, or, “If X…. then Y.” There are no extant Hellenistic elements (such as the mention of Eudoxus as an archaic authority), nor are there any Mesopotamian place names or names of kings, if any existed. The only proper noun is the reference to Arabs, an ethnic group name which crosses all linguistic boundaries in ancient Near East and Greek texts, and as discussed in the previous chapter are also ruled by Taurus in Manilius’s Astronomica. The late medieval Byzantine copies or imitations, in Greek, replicate the formulaic construction in the Qumran text.

This chapter examines the cultural and historical background to 4QBrontologion (4Q318 column viii, lines 6b–9) on its own and as a composite divination text with 4Q Zodiac Calendar. The study analyzes a wider range Byzantine texts written in Greek that contain variations of zodiac calendars and brontologia. These sections provide a broader analysis of the analogous late secondary sources in reference to the Qumran brontologion with the zodiac calendar than has hitherto been presented in earlier scholarship on this text.

1 Rochberg, “‘If P, then Q’: Form and Reasoning in Babylonian Divination,” reproduced in In the Path of the Moon, 399–410.
2 Bosworth, s.v. “Arab.” Encyclopedia Iranica. 11. 2. 201–203.
Having traced the structure and possible technical function of 4QZodiac Calendar to its origins in the Mesopotamian micro-zodiac in Chapter 1, the study examines earlier Mesopotamian omen texts related to the themes of thunder and the moon, in order to shed light on the background of 4QBrontologion. Other texts from Qumran that are sympathetic to 4QZodiac Calendar are included in this chapter. Finally, the issue of divination in Judea among the wider Judean society and the Qumran community in relation to 4QZodiac Calendar and Brontologion will be weighed up in terms of ancient texts examined here and in Chapter 1.

2.1.1 Background Scholarship

Previous scholarship on 4QBrontologion is not very extensive and has mainly focused one of the main issues that immediately concerned Milik, namely the identification of its cultural influences. The Byzantine text that Milik briefly compared with the Qumran brontologion, Geoponica 1.10, is discussed in depth further on in this section since it bears the most similar textual alignments with 4QBrontologion. As has been noticed by all previous scholars after Milik: Albani, Pingree, and Wise, the text of 4QBrontologion is very similar to several late Byzantine thunder omens written in Greek. Wise listed numerous medieval brontologia with similar wording to 4QBrontologion. Albani noted further the existence of a different kind of brontologion in the canonical Assyrian omen catalogue Enûma Anu Enlil. Pingree highlighted an important text, a medieval Greek zodiac calendar and brontologion from the national library in Paris (Suppl. gr. 1192), and juxtaposed passages from 4QBrontologion to show the points of inter-textual interest. Wise and Albani also observed the similarities between the structure and content of the Paris text and the Aramaic thunder omen text. The Paris

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3 Milik, Ten Years of Discovery, 42.
9 Albani, “Zodiakos,” 17 nn. 44, 45; Wise, Thunder in Gemini, 27 nn. 36, 39, 31 n. 63, 33 n. 69, 35 n. 78, 43 n. 97.