CHAPTER THREE

GENDERED WISDOM:
4QWILES OF THE WICKED WOMAN (4Q184)

1. INTRODUCTION

4QWiles of the Wicked Woman (4Q184) consists of six fragments, of which the first is by far the largest. The work was officially published in 1968 by John Allegro, making it one of the first Qumran wisdom texts to appear. The accuracy of his edition was called into question soon after its debut. 4Q184 contains a portrayal of a woman who leads people to sin and death. There have been several attempts to interpret this figure. Allegro suggested that she symbolizes Rome in a manner similar to the book of Revelation. Rev 17 depicts this city as a woman, the “Whore of Babylon.” Strugnell has emphasized that she should be understood against the backdrop of the wicked women of Prov 1-9, Dame Folly and the Strange Woman (יהנה יהשה). Some have argued, most notably Carmignac, that the woman of 4Q184 is a veiled...

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Regarding the name of the composition, Strugnell notes (p. 263) that the title is “heureusement abandonné maintenant par son auteur,” presumably referring to Allegro. While it might not be the most appropriate designation, as discussed below, “Wiles of the Wicked Woman” is still the commonly used title for 4Q184.


critique of a group that rivals the Dead Sea sect or a person who opposes the community. Others interpret the text as a product of a general fear of women. Baumgarten claims that the wicked woman should be understood as a demonic figure. Moore suggests that she is "the personification of a general, abstract concept"—evil. Current scholarship has moved away from the search for a single referent for the woman, focusing instead on issues such as gender and pedagogy.

The most useful clues for interpreting the woman in 4Q184 are the text's affinities with Prov 1-9, as Strugnell has suggested. The appropriation of Proverbs by 4Q184 is important for understanding it as a wisdom text. Both works associate a wicked woman with death.

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