CHAPTER SIX

WISDOM AND HALAKHAH:
4QWAYS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS (4Q420-21)

I. INTRODUCTION

4QWays of Righteousness has traditionally been considered a sapiential text.\(^1\) It gives advice regarding deliberation and patience in speech. The document also refers to a “yoke of wisd[om].” In recent years scholars have become increasingly reluctant to classify this work as a wisdom text. Tigchelaar has argued that 4QWays of Righteousness is better understood as a rulebook than a sapiential work.\(^2\) The introductory article to The Wisdom Texts from Qumran and the Development of Sapiential Thought, the first collection of essays exclusively devoted to this literature, pointedly does not consider 4Q420-21 a wisdom text.\(^3\) In this volume Hempel also

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\(^3\) A. Lange, “Die Weisheitstexte aus Qumran: Eine Einleitung,” in The Wisdom Texts from Qumran and the Development of Sapiential Thought (ed. C. Hempel, A. Lange and H. Lichtenberger; BETL 159; Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 2002) 3-30 (esp. 7). In the Dead Sea Scrolls Reader (DSSR) series 4Q420-21 is not in volume 4, which includes the sapiential texts, but rather volume 1, which covers “texts concerned with religious law.”
claims that this work should no longer be considered sapiential.⁴

Tigchelaar contributes an improved transcription of 4Q421 11 and 13 and establishes that the text is more halakhic than previously thought. But this does not necessarily mean that 4QWays of Righteousness is a rulebook. 4Q420-21 can be profitably interpreted in light of the sapiential tradition. It is aptly considered a wisdom text, albeit one that blurs the distinction between wisdom and halakhah. Portions of the text are quite similar to stipulations in the Community Rule and the Damascus Document. Elgvin argues that the oldest part of 4QWays of Righteousness consists of wisdom sayings and that this document was redacted at a later point by the yahad or circles close to it.⁵ Since 4Q420-21 is an instructional work that shows significant influence from the sapiential tradition, it can be considered a wisdom composition as a whole, but, strictly speaking, it is better understood as a wisdom text that has been expanded with material that resembles the rulebooks—a composite work, as Elgvin argues.⁶ 4Q420-21 shows that the Dead Sea sect could revise sapiential compositions.

2. 4QWAYS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Two partially preserved copies of 4QWays of Righteousness have survived—4Q420 and 4Q421. Both are in Herodian script. Seven fragments belong to 4Q420 and thirteen to 4Q421. A relationship between these two manuscripts is clear from a substantial overlap. 4Q421 1a ii-b 13-17 attests almost the same text as 4Q420 1a ii-b 1-7. The major exception is that 4Q421 is missing a line that is in 4Q420. The lacuna of 4Q421 1a ii-b 14 has space for three or four words,

⁵ *DJD* 20, 202.