INNOVATIVE READINGS
EDUCATION AND WISDOM IN THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS IN LIGHT OF THEIR BACKGROUND IN ANTIQUITY

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I. Introduction

A primary aim of societies, nations, and cultures is to educate their members to live according to the community’s ethical, sociological, and philosophical values. This educational aim is achieved by means of laws, historical stories, psalms or poetry, and other literary genres, frequently using indirect methods, and reflecting the connections of such values to religious belief and practice. Such is the case in the Bible and in postbiblical Jewish sources, and likewise in sources stemming from other ancient nations and societies.

Sapiential literature, which makes explicit its educational purpose, utilizes specific forms and content to instruct the reader. The sapiential writings discovered in Qumran enable us to study the methods of education used by the Qumran community.1 On the one hand, the apocalyptic ideology and rigorous priestly system of Jewish law that characterized the Qumran community and caused their sectarian separation from the multitude of their contemporaries might have influenced their educational methods. On the other, their reliance on biblical literature might have bound them to more traditional methods of education. In light of the potential tension between these two inclinations, it is useful to investigate the Qumran writings, especially the sapiential ones, from the standpoint of their pedagogical methods, to clarify in what ways these reflect biblical values and conservative

1 Among the earliest published Qumran writings we find copies of Instruction and Mysteries from cave 1 (1Q26 and 1Q27), edited by D. Barthelemy and J. T. Milik (Qumran Cave 1 [DJD 1; Oxford: Clarendon, 1955], 101–2; 102–7); as well as the so-called “Wiles of the Wicked Woman” (4Q184), edited by J. M. Allegro (Qumran Cave 4.1 (4Q158–4Q186) [DJD 5; Oxford: Clarendon, 1968], 82–85). The remaining sapiential texts from cave 4 were published some thirty years later: T. Elgvin et al., Qumran Cave 4.XV: Sapiential Texts, Part 1 (DJD 20; Oxford: Clarendon, 1997); and J. Strugnell, D. Harrington and T. Elgvin, Qumran Cave 4.XXIV: Sapiential Texts, Part 2 (DJD 34; Oxford: Clarendon, 1999).