This paper aims to answer two questions: First, by examining the scope of the prophetic texts involved in the interpretations, we try to answer the question, “Whose voice is heard in the Qumran pesharim?” Second, we seek to answer the question, “What was the meaning and purpose of writing such interpretations?” The Qumran pesharim are said to contain a history of the Qumran community written in a coded language. However, they contain almost no information on events concerning the history of the community and “the righteous” are mostly mentioned in relation to the future salvation. However, the pesharim do contain the history of “the other”—Pharisees, Sadducees, and the Hasmonean kings—in references that deal with recurring themes like drunkenness, intoxication, tottering, violence, and cultic sins. The reason of the interest behind even these themes is not obvious. The present study aims at exploring and demonstrating the anthropological background, as well as the historiographic purposes and traditions behind the use of these motifs.

George Brooke defined the pesharim as “a form of biblical interpretation peculiar to Qumran, in which prophetic/poetic texts are applied to postbiblical historical/eschatological settings through various literary techniques in order to substantiate a theological conviction pertaining to divine reward and punishment.”¹ This definition can be seen to encompass characteristics of form, content, method, and motive.² Qumran audience found in the texts interpreted meaningful revelations for their own time. This idea is best explained in the Habakkuk-pesher: “Then God told Habakkuk to write down what is going to happen to the generation to come; but when that period would be complete He did not make known to him” (1QpHab vii.1–2). According to their views, it was the Righteous Teacher “to whom God made known all the mysterious revelations of his servants the prophets” (1QpHab vii.4–5); thus, he alone is able to interpret ancient prophetic revelations as references to the present time. Applying prophetic or poetic texts to events of a far later time needs a special attitude to and a particular view of historical time. In Qumran views, the interpreter's time paralleled historical time (which will be called here “prophetic

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time,” or the time the prophet, the author of the text interpreted lived in). Human groups, persons, and their behavior referred to in the prophetic time appeared again in a remote age—that of the interpreter’s. Parallel ages were considered to be paralleled in every respect: human deeds were similar in any age, and so were their consequences. Sins were followed by punishment in both times, punishment being a fulfilled fact in the prophetic age; analogically, an unavoidable punishment was expected for the time of the interpreter. The fulfillment of the punishment in prophetic time was a guarantee that sins similar to those committed by the prophet’s contemporaries would be followed by a similar punishment in the interpreter’s age. This strong parallelism between the prophet’s age and the interpreter’s age is the basis for the use of nicknames or sobriquets instead of real names of historical persons and groups in the pesharim. However, the origin of the nicknames in most of the cases is different from the prophetic text interpreted. One of the rare exceptions is the case of the Angry Lion in 4QpNah 3–4 i.4–8, which seems to be a topical name; in Nahum’s text, the lion symbolizes the bellicose Assyrian empire and is interpreted in a related pesher as the Angry Lion, designating, in all likelihood a Hasmonean king-priest.3 On the other hand, some of the names in the pesharim are typological, clearly originating from biblical tradition.4

1 Types and Dichotomies

The nicknames reflect a strong dichotomy in the worldview of the interpreters, that human society is divided into two opposite groups: “we” and “the others.” These groups are identified by their attitudes to the Mosaic Law. People who consider the Law and follow it in a right way are identical with the interpreter’s group, and can be called the “we-group,” while those who violate the Law or follow an erroneous legal interpretation (halakhah) belong to the group of “the other.” These groups are characterized, respectively, by holiness and impurity.

As mentioned before, the nicknames included in the pesharim usually originate from a source different than the prophetic text that served as a basis for the interpretation. Moreover, several nicknames occur in Qumran works that are older than the pesharim, the final form of which was shaped at about the middle of the first century BCE, after the Roman conquest of Syria and neighboring

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3 There are only two distinct occurrences of the name “the Lion of Wrath” (kpyr ḫḥrw’n): in the interpretation on Hosea (4Q167 (4QpHos)b) 2:2 and in that on Nahum (4Q169 (4QpNah) 3–4 i:5). The pesher of Isaiah mentions “a lion” (kpyr) (4Q163 (4QpIsa)c 14:5).

4 Foremost are personal names like Israel, Judah, Ephraim, and Manasseh.