INTRODUCTORY FORMULAS FOR CITATION AND RE-CITATION OF BIBLICAL VERSES IN THE QUMRAN PESHARIM: Observations on a Pesher Technique

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I. Introduction: The Problems

The general formulation of the question which led to this article is: can apparently insignificant formal details be meaningful in identification or clarification of literary genres? In the narrower focus: can we conclude anything at all about pesharim or related works from the employment or omission of citation formulas before their biblical quotations? But there is an even broader and seemingly unrelated theoretical question which we should address first: what would have been the result had the Qumran texts been discovered and published in a different order than they were? What would have happened had 4QMMT and 11QTemple been discovered and published before CD and 1QS? Theories about sectarian origins and about the development of sectarian halakhah might well have been different. What if the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice had been discovered and published before 1QH? A very different picture of the theology and thematic program of Qumranic poetry would probably have emerged in the surveys of Qumran literature. In both cases, many of the presuppositions, the touchstones which have governed our research for the last 35-40 years, would likely have been quite different. The significance of the sequence of publication of the Qumran documents is a phenomenon which, I believe, has generally been overlooked.

1 An earlier, briefer, and very different, version of this paper was read under the title "Quotation and Re-quotation of Scripture in the Qumran Pesharim: A Reconsideration," at the conference on Methods of Investigation on the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Khirbet Qumran Site: Present Realities and Future Prospects sponsored by the New York Academy of Sciences and the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, held in New York in December 1992. Unfortunately, major revision of this work prevented its inclusion in the proceedings of the conference.

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Dead Sea Discoveries 1, 1 (1994)
In many ways, the study of the pesharim from Qumran remains strongly under the influence of the analysis and description of the first of those documents to be discovered and published, the Habakkuk pesher, 1QpHab. In a sense, it set the “standard” by which subsequently found pesharim were to be judged, has been studied more frequently and with greater depth than any of the other pesharim, and has often served as a model for their reconstruction and interpretation. Thus, B.D. Chilton writes, “By reason of its relative completeness and the close attention it has attracted, 1QpHab is a suitable point of departure for understanding the pesharim generally.”

D. Patte makes far more radical claims, commenting,

Another striking characteristic of the pesharim is that they are running commentaries on complete [sic] biblical texts, as is clear [my emphasis, MJB] in the well-preserved scroll of the pesher on Habakkuk. The pesharim are therefore systematic interpretations of prophetic texts. This is significant in itself, as it shows the particular “stance” or attitude which is taken toward these texts.

Most recently, in her important survey and synthesis of the pesharim, D. Dimant writes, “The pesher of Habakkuk provides the most comprehensive illustration of peshar patterns.”

1QpHab is obviously unique among the pesharim in being an

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4 D. Patte, Early Jewish Hermeneutic in Palestine (Missoula: Scholars, 1975) 300. The fact that we have pesharim on Psalm texts is also a minor objection to Patte’s formulation, although it might be removed by a reconsideration of the Qumran group’s concept of “biblical canon”, if it had one, or by revising Patte’s definition to refer to poetic, rather than prophetic, texts. Cf. D. Dimant’s remarks in “The Hebrew Bible in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Torah Quotations in the Damascus Covenant,” [Hebrew] Sha’arei Tsedek (ed. M. Fishbane and E. Tov; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1992) 116* and n. 17 dealing with peshar and prophecy.

5 D. Dimant, “Pesharim, Qumran,” Anchor Bible Dictionary 5, 248b. In her essay, “Qumran Sectarian Literature,” Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period (ed. M. Stone; Crint 2, II; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 504, she, like Patte, suggests that “continuous pesharim” are “commentaries on entire [my emphasis, MJB] biblical books.”