THE IDEOLOGICAL AND LITERARY UNITY OF 4QINSTRUCTION AND ITS AUTHORSHIP*

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1. Introduction

1.1. The sapiential text 4QInstruction (Musar le-Mevin) contains different kinds of material, consisting of theological discourses and sapiential admonitions for everyday life addressed to a student or a son, as is customary in many sapiential works. The preservation of this work in seven copies indicates its importance for the people of Qumran, even though there is no distinctive sectarian terminology or contents in this work, as has been claimed by many scholars. No organizational institutions, such as the “council of the many” or the overseer, are mentioned there. On the contrary, the admonitions deal with financial and agricultural matters pertaining to individuals, family affairs, and relationships between the individual and the authorities—all customary subjects of traditional wisdom literature. The discourses deal with the importance of studying the mysteries of wisdom, the status of the “understanding one,” and the eschatological judgement, but are without such dualistic theological terms as “sons of light” and “sons of darkness,” “Belial,” “prince of light,” etc. Nevertheless, it contains clear evidence of the apocalyptic outlook of its author/authors, who both in the theological discourses and in the admonitions for everyday life call upon the addressee to relate to "the mystery that is to be." However, this term by itself is insufficient for establishing the consistent outlook of this work or for determining its possible authorship.²

* This article was presented in the IOQS Vth Meeting, Gröningen 27–28 July, 2004, under the title “Who Wrote 4QInstruction (4Q415–418a, 4Q423, and 1Q26)?”

1 Its editio princeps was published by J. Strugnell and D.J. Harrington, and T. Elgvin, Qumran Cave 4.XXIV, Sapiential Texts, Part 2 (DJD 34; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

2 Giving attention to the contents and ideas written in this composition, scholars did

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Dead Sea Discoveries 12, 3
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1.2. In light of the diverse character of 4QInstruction, one may raise the issue of its literary unity. Does this work reflect different sources that were edited together, a phenomenon that appears, e.g. in the Book of Proverbs, or was it composed from the outset in two different genres that complement one another?

The literary characteristics of the two different genres comprised in 4QInstruction, the sapiential admonitions for everyday life and the theological discourses, have been depicted and defined by T. Elgvin, among others. He suggested that the composite work represents a conflation of two literary layers, of which the admonitions represent an older and more traditional stratum than the theological discourses. These were adjusted by an editor to make them relevant to the theological views of his audience. Elgvin considered the apocalyptic view of the చిన్నయం (“the mystery that is to be”) as the main theological theme of the wisdom instructions in this composition. He claimed that the integration of this idea into traditional admonitions, such as family relationships (4Q416 2 iii 13–21) or agricultural instruction (4Q423 3, par. 1Q26 2), is a reworking of earlier parental and cultic material, and is thus consistent with his hypothesis of there being “two literary layers” in this work.


5 Elgvin, “Wisdom and Apocalypticism,” 236–37. The parental instruction is based