WISDOM’S PEDAGOGY:
A COMPARISON OF PROVERBS VII AND 4Q184

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Scholars have recently given some attention to the pedagogical methods of Israel’s Wisdom traditions. Such inquiry is particularly germane to the book of Proverbs, which “proceeds from, reflects, and expresses certain beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning”. However, little formal attention has been given to a comparison of the pedagogy of extra-biblical Wisdom texts with that of the biblical Wisdom texts upon which they depend. Though the book of Proverbs has scant attestation at Qumran, several documents provide exceptional points of contact with the canonical book. The secondary focus of this essay will be on 4Q184, also known as Wiles of the Wicked Woman—a document that explicitly relies on the treatment of the Strange Woman and Lady Folly in Proverbs i-ix, especially in chapters v-vii.

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4 Proverbs (4Q102) and Proverbs (4Q103) are the only two representatives, containing 39 words or portions of words and 125 words or portions of words respectively. See N. Jastram, “Proverbs, Book of”, in Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls (eds. L. Schiffman and J. VanderKam; 2 vols.; Oxford, 2000) II, pp. 701-702.


6 First published (though faultily) by J. Allegro, “Wiles of the Wicked Woman: A Sapiential Work from Qumran’s Fourth Cave”, PEQ 96 (1964), pp. 53-55. The authoritative edition is now that of Allegro in Qumran Cave 4.1 (4Q158-4Q186) (DJD, V; Oxford, 1968), pp. 82-85, pl. XXVIII (Frag. 1), though this should be supplemented...
The instruction of the father to his son\textsuperscript{7} in Proverbs vii mirrors something of the confusing nature of reality, as both erotic and repulsive description point to the same Strange Woman. In some ways the pedagogical goals of the father seem to be undercut by the attractive imagery with which he describes his “villainous” subject. Thus it is an ideal text for examining the complexities of the teaching and learning process in the Wisdom traditions of ancient Israel.

In 4Q184, the pedagogical goals of Proverbs i-ix have been reappropriated within a different schema, and the character of the Strange Woman has been transformed by its authors. The metaphors surrounding this figure are more clearly defined. The cosmic dimension is emphasized, and the instruction is imbued with the dualistic elements of the religion of the Dead Sea sect.

The differences displayed by these two texts reflect diverse pedagogies, each formed by the teacher’s attitude toward utilizing indeterminacy—specifically its usefulness in instructing the young. While Proverbs vii capitalizes on indeterminacy as a teaching tool and utilizes multivalent language in order to prepare the son to adapt to complex obstacles on the way to wisdom, 4Q184 replaces the indeterminacy of Prov. vii with more determinate language, thereby minimizing the student’s flexibility to counteract opposition which lacks clear delimitation.\textsuperscript{9} In seeking to establish this thesis, this essay will focus on how each implied instructor presents the text’s female figure as a pedagogical vehicle, treats speech as a central theme, and operates to control reality.


\textsuperscript{7} As J. Crenshaw (“Education in Ancient Israel”, \textit{JBL} 104 [1985], pp. 601-15) states, “[E]very single use of father and son within Proverbs can be understood precisely as that, a father instructing his son rather than technical language for teacher and student” (p. 614).

\textsuperscript{8} By this I mean the state in which the referent of any sign, symbol, metaphor, etc. is not clearly established, so as to require the listener/reader to puzzle out the meaning.

\textsuperscript{9} I am particularly indebted to essays by L. Perdue (“Liminality as a Social Setting for Wisdom Instructions”, \textit{ZAW} 93 [1981], pp. 114-26), S. Lasine (“Indeterminacy and the Bible: A Review of Literary and Anthropological Theories and Their Application to Biblical Texts”, \textit{HS} 27 [1986], pp. 48-80), and R. Van Leeuwen (“Liminality and Worldview in Proverbs 1-9”, \textit{Semeia} 50 [1990], pp. 111-44) for providing some of the terminology with which to express the concept of this thesis and its development throughout this essay.