

Pesher as Commentary

Pieter B. Hartog

It has become a commonplace to say that the pesharim are the earliest scriptural commentaries known to us.¹ Yet the study of the pesharim seems to be restricted almost exclusively to scholars of Judaism, the Hebrew Bible, or the New Testament. Only rarely, if at all, are the Qumran commentaries² included in broader studies on commentaries and their linguistic, religious, or social aspects.³ This paradox is undesirable both from the viewpoint of the study of the pesharim and from that of the generic study of commentaries. Situating the pesharim in the wider context of ancient commentary writing opens up a comparative perspective on the Qumran commentaries. Comparative studies of the pesharim have seen the light rather continuously since the discovery of Pesher Habakkuk in 1947. These investigations exhibit two characteristic features. Firstly, most of them search for historical links between the pesharim and other interpretive traditions from the ancient world, so creating the picture of the pesharim as taking up and combining aspects from a variety of other traditions.⁴ Secondly, most comparative studies, be they historically focused

I am grateful to Hanna Tervanotko for her comments on a draft of the paper I presented in Munich and to the participants at the IOQS meeting for their remarks. I also thank Hindy Najman for her helpful comments on an earlier version of this article.

- 1 When I speak of “the pesharim” I refer to the collection of so-called “continuous pesharim” as they are assembled by Maurya P. Horgan, *Pesharim: Qumran Interpretations of Biblical Books*, CBQMS 8 (Washington, DC: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1979).
- 2 By “Qumran commentaries” I refer to the place of recovery of these documents (the caves at and near Qumran), without making any a priori assumptions about their relationship with the people that lived there.
- 3 The pesharim are notably absent from Jan Assmann and Burkhard Gladigow, eds., *Text und Kommentar*, ALK 4 (Munich: Fink, 1995); Glenn W. Most, ed., *Commentaries—Kommentare*, Aporemata 4 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999); Marie-Odile Goulet-Cazé, ed., *Le commentaire entre tradition et innovation: Actes du colloque international de l’institut des traditions textuelles (Paris et Villejuif, 22–25 septembre 1999)* (Paris: Vrin, 2000). The thematic issue of *Dead Sea Discoveries* 19 (2012) is more promising, although few contributors take their cue from broader theories on commentary writing. George J. Brooke’s contribution (“Some Comments on Commentary,” *DSD* 19 [2012]: 249–66) raises important issues, some of which recur in the following pages.
- 4 Some recent examples are Markus Bockmuehl, “The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of Biblical Commentary,” in *Text, Thought, and Practice in Qumran and Early Christianity*,

or not, investigate structural and hermeneutical aspects of the pesharim.⁵ In this essay, I do not seek for historical connections, though I do not wish to deny the usefulness of historical investigations. Nor do I focus on structural or hermeneutical aspects of the pesharim. Instead, I investigate the dynamics of self-presentation and the accrual of authority as they surface in the pesharim. Approaching these dynamics in terms drawn from more generally orientated studies on ancient commentary writing, I aim to show that the pesharim, like other commentaries, portray themselves and develop their authority by negotiating several sets of oppositions.⁶ I also propose that the distinctive features of the Qumran commentaries are not the result of the *type* of dynamics that the pesharim develop, but of the *way* in which they develop it.

This focus on the dynamics that shape the pesharim has consequences for how we conceive of the genre of “commentary.” Writing about the use of the idea of genre in biblical studies, Hindy Najman distinguishes two manners of speaking about genre: texts can either be produced as belonging to a certain genre (i.e., text production is governed by the expectations and norms of its producers) or genre can be used as a classificatory tool by later readers of texts.⁷ To my mind, the term “commentary” can be used in both ways. As a consequence,

ed. Ruth A. Clements and Daniel R. Schwartz, *STDJ* 84 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 3–29; Daniel A. Machiela, “The Qumran Pesharim as Biblical Commentaries: Historical Context and Lines of Development,” *DSD* 19 (2012): 313–62; Alex P. Jassen, “The Pesharim and the Rise of Commentary in Early Jewish Scriptural Interpretation,” *DSD* 19 (2012): 363–98; Reinhard G. Kratz, “Text und Kommentar: Die Pescharim von Qumran im Kontext der hellenistischen Bildungstradition,” in *Von Rom nach Bagdad: Bildung und Religion in der späteren Antike und im klassischen Islam*, ed. Peter Gemeinhardt and Sebastian Günther (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 51–80; Pieter B. Hartog, *Pesher and Hypomnema: A Comparison of Two Commentary Collections from the Hellenistic-Roman Period*, *STDJ* 121 (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

- 5 Some recent examples are Martti Nissinen, “Pesharim as Divination: Qumran Exegesis, Omen Interpretation and Literary Prophecy,” in *Prophecy after the Prophets? The Contribution of the Dead Sea Scrolls to the Understanding of Biblical and Extra-Biblical Prophecy*, ed. Kristin de Troyer, Armin Lange, and Lucas L. Schulte, *CBET* 52 (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 43–60; Armin Lange and Zlatko Pleše, “The Qumran Pesharim and the Derveni Papyrus: Transpositional Hermeneutics in Ancient Jewish and Ancient Greek Commentaries,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls in Context: Integrating the Dead Sea Scrolls in the Study of Ancient Texts, Languages, and Cultures*, ed. Armin Lange, Emanuel Tov, and Matthias Weigold, *VTSup* 140 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 895–922; eidem, “Transpositional Hermeneutics: A Hermeneutical Comparison of the Derveni Papyrus, Aristobulus of Alexandria, and the Qumran Pesharim,” *JAJ* 3 (2012): 15–67.
- 6 On my understanding of the “dynamics” of commentary see the following section.
- 7 Hindy Najman, “The Idea of Biblical Genre: From Discourse to Constellation,” in *Prayer and Poetry in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature: Essays in Honor of Eileen Schuller on the*

my discussion of the dynamics of the pesharim touches on both ways in which we can speak of “peshar as commentary.” On the one hand, ancient writers seem to be aware of a norm for writing interpretive works which entails: (1) dividing between the quotation of the base text (the lemma) and its interpretation; and (2) composing a literary entity which consists of alternating lemmata and interpretation.⁸ It is possible to refer to this norm as “commentary” and thus to acknowledge the productivity of this genre in the ancient world. Within this context, this discussion of the dynamics of the pesharim illustrates one of the ways in which these dynamics can be expressed in a commentary. This invites a cross-cultural comparison of the way in which this type of dynamics surfaces in other interpretive writings which, like the pesharim, distinguish clearly between lemma and interpretation and consist of alternations of these elements.⁹ This type of writings is rare in this period: the readiest points of comparison are works of Greek and Latin scholarship, Philo’s commentaries, and possibly the Egyptian Demotic Chronicle. This type of research is not wholly new in the field of Qumran studies, though the comparative study of the pesharim and Greek and Latin commentary writing is still in its infancy.¹⁰ By pointing out the type of dynamics that can be encountered in commentaries and by illustrating the way in which it is developed in the pesharim, this essay aims to contribute to this type of investigation.

On the other hand, the type of dynamics that is the topic of in this essay is not restricted to writings that consist of alternate lemmata and interpretations, but also feature in many (if not most) other interpretive works. My illustration

Occasion of Her 65th Birthday, ed. Jeremy Penner, Ken M. Penner, and Cecilia Wassen, STDJ 98 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 307–21, esp. 309.

- 8 Such an awareness can be assumed on the basis of the remarkable structure of this kind of writing, which seems to require a conscious effort by its author to differentiate between base text and interpretation. The fact that the pesharim deal with a rather specific range of base texts, namely prophetic texts (including the Psalms), supports the idea that they were consciously composed in the way that they are. At the same time, we must bear in mind that we find very little self-reflection by the authors of these texts and, hence, we cannot be entirely certain that they consciously wrote their compositions according to a set of known norms.
- 9 On the use of cross-cultural comparisons for the understanding of the pesharim see George J. Brooke, “Genre Theory, Rewritten Bible and Peshar,” *DSD* 17 (2010): 332–57, esp. 350–54.
- 10 Apart from the works cited in nn. 4–5 above, see Maren R. Niehoff, “Commentary Culture in the Land of Israel from an Alexandrian Perspective,” *DSD* 19 (2012): 442–63. Niehoff treats the way in which the pesharim and Alexandrian commentaries present themselves and concludes that there are significant differences between them.

of the type of dynamics developed in the pesharim can, thus, also be understood as an invitation to nuance traditional preferences for structure as a constitutive element of the “commentary” genre. We may approach “commentary” more broadly and approach it, in Najman’s terms, not so much as a “genre,” but as a “constellation” of works exhibiting a similar type of dynamics.¹¹ This constellation would at least, but probably not only, include works commonly classified as “Rewritten Bible.”¹² The type of dynamics developed in these latter works is in many regards similar to that in the pesharim. The book of Jubilees, for instance, often closely paraphrases its base text, thus accentuating its authority. But it also portrays its own contents—in contrast with those of its base text—as being inscribed on heavenly tablets and dictated by the angel of the presence.¹³ The Temple Scroll, though it also often paraphrases its base

11 For Najman, the concept of “genre” can be used “insofar as the classifications we employ are supposed to capture generic norms of which Second Temple text producers were consciously aware” (“The Idea of Biblical Genre,” 321). This definition is based on the treatment of “genre” in classical literature. A “constellation,” on the other hand, points to a group of compositions that can be classified as similar in some regards, but of whose similarities their ancient producers need not have been aware.

Najman’s distinction between “genre” and “constellation” is useful in that it proposes a well-defined and restricted use of terminology. At the same time, the distinction between “genre” and “constellation” is blurry, especially in the case of commentaries. As we find little to no reflection by ancient commentators on their own work in terms of generic classifications (see n. 8 above), our description of “commentary” as a “genre” or a “constellation” remains somewhat speculative, as it depends on our reconstruction of the ancient commentators’ awareness of norms for the production of interpretive works.

Cf. in this regard the work of George Brooke, which work starts not from a classical, but from a modern literary-critical idea of genre. For Brooke, genre is to be understood as an open-ended, modern way of classifying literature, whereby texts can belong to several genres at the same time (an idea he takes from Derrida and Perloff). For this reason, initial generic definitions must be broad rather than narrow. See most notably his “Genre Theory,” esp. 342: “To clarify the character of ‘rewritten Bible’ and peshar, the scholar needs to begin with a wide set of literary compositions, at least all those in Early Judaism concerned with the transmission of authoritative traditions, both those that might be labelled as scripture and those that interpret them implicitly or explicitly.”

12 The usefulness of this term has been variously problematized in recent years. For an overview of the debate see Armin Lange, “In the Second Degree: Ancient Jewish Paratextual Literature in the Context of Graeco-Roman and Ancient Near Eastern Literature,” in *In the Second Degree: Paratextual Literature in Ancient Near Eastern and Ancient Mediterranean Culture and Its Reflections in Medieval Literature*, ed. Philip Alexander, idem, and Renate Pillinger (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 3–40.

13 Hindy Najman, “Interpretation as Primordial Writing: Jubilees and Its Authority Conferring Strategies,” *JSJ* 30 (1999): 379–410.

text, seeks to accrue authority for itself by reformulating its base text in the first person, implying that it contains God's very words.¹⁴ Both compositions furthermore present themselves as what Najman calls "Mosaic discourse."¹⁵ Lastly, Jubilees and the Temple Scroll accrue their own authority by claiming to contain the true interpretation of the Torah.¹⁶ This illustrates that the type of dynamics illustrated in this essay is not unique to explicit commentaries like the pesharim, but that it is a broader feature of secondary and interpretive literature.

My main frame of reference in the following pages is the work of scholars working on commentary writing in the classical world. Secondary literature on the various traditions of commentary writing on classical literature tends not so much to treat the hermeneutics of these commentaries, but rather their purpose, setting, and, indeed, dynamics.¹⁷ This, as we have seen, stands in contrast with secondary literature on Jewish commentary writing, where hermeneutics is one of the main scholarly interests. This difference must probably be attributed to the explicit way in which some passages in Rabbinic literature reflect on their own hermeneutics by listing a variety of middot. Consciously or unconsciously having these lists in mind, scholars working on Jewish commentaries tend almost directly to focus on their hermeneutics.¹⁸ On the other hand, the absence of such lists of hermeneutical techniques from the classical literature leads to different views on "commentary" and its production. Hence, this area is particularly prone to benefit from a cross-fertilization between Jewish and classical studies. The attention that scholars of Judaism give to the

14 Florentino García Martínez and Marc Vervenne, "Ancient Interpretations of Jewish Scriptures in light of Dead Sea Scrolls," in *Textual Criticism and Dead Sea Scrolls Studies in Honour of Julio Trebolle Barrera: Florilegium Complutense*, ed. Andrés Piquer Otero and Pablo A. Torijano Morales, JSJSup 157 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 83–97, esp. 95–96.

15 *Seconding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism*, JSJSup 77 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 41–69.

16 Najman "Interpretation as Primordial Writing," 406–9.

17 To give just two examples: in his introduction to a volume on commentaries, Glenn Most lists several aspects of commentary writing that he deems worthy of further investigation. Hermeneutics is not one of them. See Glenn W. Most, "Preface," in idem, *Commentaries—Kommentare*, vii–xv. More recently, Francesca Schironi's extensive and important discussion of classical commentary does not have a section on the hermeneutics or exegetical techniques used in classical commentaries. See Francesca Schironi, "Greek Commentaries," *DSD* 19 (2012): 399–441.

18 This is not to say that the middot can be used to describe the hermeneutics of the pesharim or any other Early Jewish interpretive writing, including Rabbinic literature.

hermeneutics of Jewish commentaries and the way in which these are discussed can offer an important impetus to a more systematic treatment of the hermeneutics of classical commentaries. At the same time, the attention that scholars working on classical commentaries pay to aspects of “commentary” other than hermeneutics has much to teach scholars working on Jewish commentaries. It is in this latter vein that I seek to explore the type of dynamics that is developed in the pesharim and classical commentaries alike.

The Dynamics of Commentary

The origins of a commentary lie in the experience of a reader or a group of readers that they stand at a distance of their text.¹⁹ For one reason or another, the readers suspect their text not to reveal its clearest or fullest meaning at first glance. A gap exists between the text and its readers. The aim of the commentator, who is also a reader of the text, is to bridge this gap. As the text is turned into a base text, the commentator mediates between that base text and its readers. In the process, the commentator reformulates the base text so as to bring it closer to its readers: the base text is interpreted.²⁰ In the case of explicit commentary, the results of this exposition are juxtaposed with the base text. Thus, the lemmata in an explicit commentary present the base text to the reader, and they are followed by its interpretation. Exhibiting this form, this type of commentary explicitly presents itself as secondary literature, since the base text takes structural precedence over the interpretation which follows it. This is meant to imply that the base text comes first hermeneutically too. Explicit commentaries can be said to present themselves as mere mediators, subservient to the base text and devoted to foster its clarity and meaningfulness. On their own terms, explicit commentaries are, thus, interpretive texts that serve to render the base text more understandable to its readers.

19 The term “text” can refer to a variety of cultural phenomena. See, e.g., Armin Lange and Zlatko Pleše, “Text between Religious Cultures: Intertextuality in Graeco-Roman Judaism,” in *Between Text and Text: The Hermeneutics of Intertextuality in Ancient Cultures and Their Afterlife in Medieval and Modern Times*, ed. Michaela Bauks et al., JAJSup 6 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 328–50 (with literature). In this essay I limit my attention to written texts and their interpretation.

20 Wolfgang Raible, “Arten des Kommentierens—Arten der Sinnbildung—Arten des Verstehens: Spielarten der generischen Intertextualität,” in Assmann and Gladigow, *Text und Kommentar*, 51–73 usefully speaks of interpretation as “Umkodierung.”

On our terms, however, commentators and commentaries are often not so devoted to their base texts. Instead, they communicate their own message and tell their own story, which can be very different from that of the base text. This is not to say that commentators can cut the ties with their base text. After all, it is its link with an authoritative base text that provides the commentary with its *raison d'être* and part of its own authority.²¹ Commentators can, however, define the nature and the implications of this link in their own image. The gap between the base text and its readers, the position of the commentator in the interpretive process, and the purpose of interpretation are no objective givens. Instead, they are constructs by the commentator and the textual community in which the commentary functions.²² These constructs allow the commentator to incorporate and communicate other interests than those of the base text in the commentary. In this way, the base text is appropriated for the purposes of the commentators and their audiences.²³ It must be observed that such procedures are not restricted to “non-literal” commentaries, but are a fundamental feature of each commentary, including those commonly known as “philological.”²⁴ No commentary, therefore, merely repeats the message of its

21 I use “authority” and “authoritative” in a loose sense. For the purposes of this essay the term incorporates two aspects of the commentator’s dealings with his text: first, that he had some reason to write a commentary on this base text rather than others; second, that he allowed the base text to exert some influence on the direction of its interpretation.

22 I do not explicitly discuss the role of the textual communities in this essay. Yet, a textual community which shares the constructs of the commentator must be assumed in order for a commentary to achieve a certain status and validity. On this topic see the useful remarks by Most, “Preface,” ix–x. On the *pesharim* see Jutta Jokiranta, *Social Identity and Sectarianism in the Qumran Movement*, STDJ 105 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 111–213.

23 E.g., Ineke Sluiter, “The Violent Scholiast: Power Issues in Ancient Commentaries,” in *Writing Science: Medical and Mathematical Authorship in Ancient Greece*, ed. Matthias Asper (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), 191–213.

24 In many scholarly disciplines, the distinction between literal and non-literal, philological and transpositional, or pure and applied, exegesis is now considered to be fluid rather than strict. See already Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 89: “It is not often realized that all commentary is allegorical interpretation.”

In the field of classics, several scholars have legitimately questioned the borderlines between philological and allegorical interpretation by showing that many allegorists had philological interests as well or, instead, by arguing that Alexandrian scholars were not as opposed to allegorical readings as scholars once believed. See, e.g., A.A. Long, “Stoic Readings of Homer,” in *Homer’s Ancient Readers: The Hermeneutics of Greek Epic’s Earliest Exegetes*, ed. Robert Lamberton and John J. Keaney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 41–66; James I. Porter, “Hermeneutic Lines and Circles: Aristarchus and Crates

base text, even if it claims or aims to do so. Instead, every commentary construes the gap between the base text and its readers, its own aims, and its position in the interpretive process in a distinct fashion. These constructs foster and uphold the validity and authority of the commentary. Hence, each commentary develops and underscores its own authority and the validity in an intricate dynamics, based on the way in which it construes and portrays the exegetical process.

In a discussion of ancient commentaries on Greek literature which “engage the didactic content of the source-text,” Ineke Sluiter suggests that these dynamics take shape in the interplay between four sets of oppositions.²⁵ She writes:

If one constructs a modern picture of the genre of ancient commentaries, four sets of oppositions stand out throughout antiquity. (1) There are two fundamental assumptions about the source-text, namely (a) that it is a great text but (b) that it needs the commentator’s efforts to be optimally effective (authority versus unclarity). (2) The commentator has to find a balance between (a) making the most of his source-text (a strategy that is bound to increase the importance of his own work) and (b) maintaining the intellectual attitude of an independent critical thinker (charity versus criticism). (3) The commentator is characterized by having a dual professional affiliation: (a) he is the colleague of his source-author, qua philosopher, mathematician, physician, and so on, and at the same time, (b) he

on the Exegesis of Homer,” in Lamberton and Keaney, *Homer’s Ancient Readers*, 67–114; Nicholas J. Richardson, “Homer and his Ancient Critics,” in *Books 21–24*, vol. 6 of *The Iliad: A Commentary*, ed. Geoffrey S. Kirk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 25–49; René Nünlist, “Aristarchus and Allegorical Interpretation,” in *Ancient Scholarship and Grammar: Archetypes, Concepts and Contexts*, ed. Stephanos Matthaios, Franco Montanari, and Antonios Rengakos, *TiCSup* 8 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 105–17; more generally Franco Montanari, “Ancient Scholarship and Classical Studies,” in Matthaios, idem, and Rengakos, *Ancient Scholarship*, 11–24 (16–17).

Similar statements have been made on Jewish scriptural interpretation by, e.g., Ithamar Gruenwald, “The ‘Scripture Effect’: An Essay on the Sociology of the Interpretative-Reading of ‘Texts,’” in Assmann and Gladigow, *Text und Kommentar*, 75–91, esp. 75; George J. Brooke, “Reading the Plain Meaning of Scripture in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Jewish Ways of Reading the Bible*, ed. idem, *JSSSup* 11 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 67–90.

- 25 Ineke Sluiter, “The Dialectics of Genre: Some Aspects of Secondary Literature and Genre in Antiquity,” in *Matrices of Genre: Authors, Canons, and Society*, ed. Mary Depew and Dirk Obbink, *CHSC* 4 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 183–203 (184).

belongs in the tradition of commentators, with a specific competence in grammar and exegesis. He will feel the need to downplay these latter qualifications in favor of the former, in accordance with the ubiquitous contempt for the “mere grammarian” (“mere grammatian” versus “real scholar”). (4) Finally, there are the modes of transmission: (a) the stable written nature of the source-text contrasts with (b) the improvised, oral aspects, and fluid nature, of the commentary (written versus oral).²⁶

The fourth of these sets of oppositions is slightly problematic, both for classical commentaries and the pesharim. Whereas the commentaries that Sluiter discusses do indeed comment on a base text of a “stable written nature,” this does not seem to be a universal trait of base texts, nor is it a prerequisite for commentary writing. The earliest explicit commentaries on Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, for instance, saw the light in an era in which the text of these epics had not yet stabilized.²⁷ The pesharim, too, do not imply a stable text-form of their base texts, but attest to and make use of the fluidity of the scriptural text in this period.²⁸ The other three sets of oppositions which Sluiter outlines, can be recognized in the pesharim as well. In what follows I discuss these under two headings, each of them corresponding with two seemingly contradictory interests between which the commentary must negotiate. Firstly, the base text. As Sluiter points out, the writing of a commentary on a text implies that this text held some authority for the commentator. Yet the text, albeit authoritative, is not self-evident: it needs the commentator to become fully effective.

²⁶ “Dialectics,” 187.

²⁷ Aristarchus is assumed to have been the first to write an explicit commentary on Homer’s epics. His work has not been transmitted directly, but we may gain some insight in its form from the remainders of other ancient hypomnemata on papyrus and in its contents from the later scholia collections. The text of Homer on which the Alexandrian scholars commented was not yet a stable entity, but displayed a significant amount of fluidity. A substantial part of the exegetical efforts of the Alexandrian scholars, therefore, was directed towards dividing between spurious and original lines. On Aristarchus’s textual and exegetical work see, e.g., Dirk M. Schenkeveld, “Aristarchus and ΟΜΗΡΟΣ ΦΙΛΟΤΕΧΝΟΣ: Some Fundamental Ideas of Aristarchus on Homer as a Poet,” *Mnemosyne* 23 (1970): 162–78; Kathleen McNamee, “Aristarchus and ‘Everyman’s’ Homer,” *GRBS* 22 (1981): 247–55; Nünlist, “Aristarchus and Allegorical Interpretation.” On the fluid state of the Homeric text in this period see Stephanie West, *The Ptolemaic Papyri of Homer*, PC 3 (Köln: Westdeutscher, 1967); Michael Haslam, “Homeric Papyri and Transmission of the Text,” in *A New Companion to Homer*, ed. Ian Morris and Barry Powell, MnS 163 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 55–100, esp. 63–69.

²⁸ See the following section.

This ambiguous status of the base text informs the efforts of the commentator, which Sluiter also describes. To the extent that the base text holds special authority, it is the task of the commentator to make the most of it. If the commentary ends up being too distant from the base text, it loses its credibility. On the other hand, to the extent that the base text is not self-evident, the writing of a commentary also enables the commentator to communicate his or her personal interests whilst interpreting and reformulating the base text. Every commentator, therefore, must steer a course between the two ideal typical poles of reiterating the base text or subduing it to express his or her own viewpoints. Secondly, the author of the base text. Sluiter points out that commentators often depict themselves and their work as continuous with the author of the base text and his or her work. Yet, they also attempt to surpass the base text author, in the sense that they imply for themselves the ability to render the base text more intelligible than its author did.

In Sluiter's terms, every commentator is both a "colleague of his source-author" and part of "the tradition of commentators." In classical commentaries, this set of oppositions is often negotiated by the commentator's downplaying his role as a grammarian. This need not, of course, be the case in other traditions.²⁹ But the tension between the base text author and the commentator seems to be a universal characteristic of commentaries. This is to suggest that all commentators must position themselves on the scale between identifying with the base text author and accessing the base text as a disengaged newcomer. Thirdly, I consider a set of oppositions which Sluiter does not discuss here:³⁰ that between the commentator and the work of other commentators. Commentary is a traditional genre, in the sense that issues which attract the attention of one commentator tend to pop up in subsequent commentaries.³¹ At the same time, every commentator wishes to add something new to what his predecessors have discovered. This creates another set of oppositions: every commentary needs to find its way between repeating and doing justice to the work of its predecessors and distancing itself

29 In the classical tradition, this way of negotiating this set of oppositions is a result of the generally low esteem in which grammarians were held. On this topic see, e.g., Raffaella Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 59–65.

30 She treats some aspects of it in her "Metatexts and the Principle of Charity," in *Metahistoriography: Theoretical and Methodological Aspects of the Historiography of Linguistics*, ed. Peter Schmitter and Marijke van der Wal (Münster: Nodus, 1998), 11–27.

31 See, e.g., Christina Shuttleworth Kraus, "Introduction: Reading Commentaries/Commentaries as Reading," in *The Classical Commentary: Histories, Practices, Theory*, ed. Roy K. Gibson and eadem, MnS 232 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 1–27, esp. 16–20.

from it. Thus, every commentary exhibits its own dynamics in which it negotiates three sets of oppositions: that between doing justice to its base text and appropriating it for its own purposes; that between identifying with the base text author and approaching its base text as an exegete or newcomer; and that between reiterating the work of other commentaries and distancing itself from it. It is between these poles that commentaries construe their validity and authority.

Base Text and Commentary

The authority of the base text is felt throughout the pesharim. As I have hinted at above, the structure of these commentaries gives pride of place to Scripture. Not only does the commentary quote the base text in lemmata, thus distinguishing it from its exposition,³² but it also tends to present the lemmata in the order of the base text. This consecutiveness of lemmata in the “continuous pesharim” reflects the influence which the commentator allows the base text to play on the structure of the commentary. At the same time, it is the commentator who selects what parts of Scripture to include in the commentary and what not. The absence of Hab 3 from Peshar Habakkuk and of Psalm 38–44 from 4QPeshar Psalms A reflects the commentator’s decisions on the extent of the base text. Thus, the structure of the pesharim reflects the ambiguous link between the commentary and the base text. The structural primacy of the base text implies its hermeneutical primacy. In this fashion, the peshar appropriates the authority of Scripture for itself: the commentary is valid and convincing because it derives directly from Scripture. On the other hand, the shape of the base text from which the commentary derives, is determined by the interests of the commentator.

It is worthwhile in this context to reflect on the use of so-called “exegetical variants” in the Qumran commentaries. William Brownlee was the first to suggest that peshar commentators may alter the appearance of their base texts.³³ Various scholars have reiterated Brownlee’s claims, occasionally

32 This division is often indicated explicitly by *vacats* as well. On the various uses of *vacats* in the pesharim, see Gregory L. Doudna, *4Q Peshar Nahum: A Critical Edition*, JSPSup 35, CIS 8 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 233–52; Emanuel Tov, *Scribal Practices and Approaches Reflected in the Texts Found in the Judean Desert*, STDJ 54 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 326–30 (Appendix 7).

33 William H. Brownlee, “Biblical Interpretation among the Sectaries of the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *BA* 14 (1951): 53–76 (61; hermeneutical principle 4).

drawing a comparison with the rabbinic procedure of *al tigre*.³⁴ Others, however, have questioned this use of exegetical variants in the light of the plurality of Scripture, suggesting that commentators did not alter the base text themselves, but picked the reading most appropriate for their exposition.³⁵ This dichotomy is unhelpful, as there is no rigid distinction between the transmission and interpretation of Scripture. Transmission is itself an interpretive process.³⁶ It comes as no surprise, therefore, that some of the same principles inform both the transmission of Scripture and its exposition in the pesharim.³⁷ The fluidity of the scriptural text and the shape of its interpretation in commentaries and other interpretive compositions are two sides of the same coin. This fluidity comprises the tension between base text and commentary. It opens up the base text for interpretation and enables the commentator to make the most of it. At the same time, it asserts and enhances the authority of the base text by presenting it as an open-ended composition of continued relevance.

-
- 34 E.g., Asher Finkel, "The Peshar of Dreams and Scriptures," *RevQ* 4/15 (1963): 357–70, esp. 368; George J. Brooke, *Exegesis at Qumran: 4QFlorilegium in its Jewish Context*, JSOTSup 29 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985). For specific cases see Brooke, "The Biblical Texts in the Qumran Commentaries: Scribal Errors or Exegetical Variants?" in *Early Jewish and Christian Exegesis: Studies in Memory of William Hugh Brownlee*, ed. Craig A. Evans and William F. Stinespring (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 85–100.
- 35 E.g., Timothy H. Lim, "Biblical Quotations in the Pesharim and the Text of the Bible: Methodological Considerations," in *The Bible as Book: The Hebrew Bible and the Judaean Desert Discoveries*, ed. Edward D. Herbert and Emanuel Tov (London: British Library, 2002), 71–79; more emphatically Doudna, *4Q Peshar Nahum*, 67–70.
- 36 This is to say that textual transmission is a reflection of the living use of texts within communities. Useful suggestions how this realization should influence our thinking about issues of textual transmission, formation, and interpretation are given, e.g. and with different emphases, by George J. Brooke, "New Perspectives on the Bible and Its Interpretation in the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *The Dynamics of Language and Exegesis at Qumran*, ed. Devorah Dimant and Reinhard G. Kratz, FAT 2/35 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 19–37; Hindy Najman, "Configuring the Text in Biblical Studies," in *A Teacher for All Generations: Essays in Honor of James C. VanderKam*, ed. Eric F. Mason et al., JSJSup 153 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 3–22.
- 37 I am thinking of principles such as metathesis, the interchange of similar letters, etc. It is noteworthy that these principles are in no way unique to the pesharim or even Jewish interpretations of Scripture. For instance, they play a prominent role in ancient etymology and the interpretation of classical literature. See Helen Peraki-Kyriakidou, "Aspects of Ancient Etymologizing," *CQ* 52 (2002): 478–93; Maria Broggiato, "The Use of Etymology as an Exegetical Tool in Alexandria and Pergamum: Some Examples from the Homeric Scholia," in *Etymologia: Studies in Ancient Etymology: Proceedings of the Cambridge Conference on Ancient Etymology 25–27 September 2000*, ed. Christos Nifadopoulos, HSSSHL 9 (Münster: Nodus, 2003), 65–70.

The base text may be allowed to influence the form of its interpretation as well. When the commentator paraphrases his base text, or uses words from the base text or their synonyms in his interpretation, he appropriates the contents of the base text for his interpretation by recreating them. By paraphrasing the base text, the commentator validates it and presents it as the source for his exposition. He aligns his own interests with those of the base text, thus affirming the latter's authority.³⁸ At the same time, the commentator may divide the base text up into smaller parts and ascribe to each of them a different topic. Rather than recreating the structure of the base text, the commentator "atomizes" it. As he cuts the links between the various parts of the base text, he also discounts their bearing on each other's meaning. Thus, the commentator can, in principle at least, offer a different meaning for each part of the base text. As he ignores the scriptural embedding of these parts of the base text, but interprets them in the light of a new context which he himself provides, the commentator can be said to recontextualize the lemma.³⁹ These dynamics between paraphrase and recontextualization illustrate the tension between base text and commentary: though an authoritative source of exposition, the base text nevertheless is not fully intelligible when it is not explained by the commentator.

The last aspect of the dynamics between base text and commentary in the pesharim concerns the historical memory of the peshar commentators. It has long been commonplace to say that these commentators interpret Scripture in the light of their own historical circumstances. Thus, André Dupont-Sommer remarks that the pesharim "violently apply the text to their own circumstances."⁴⁰ In a similar vein, Shani Tzoref observes that, in the pesharim, "biblical poetic/prophetic texts are applied to postbiblical historical/eschatological settings."⁴¹ Even though the expositions of Scripture in the pesharim occasionally seem to be informed by the historical circumstances in which the commentator found

38 On paraphrase in Peshar Habakkuk see Karl Elliger, *Studien zum Habakuk-Kommentar vom Toten Meer*, BHT 15 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1953), 127–30; Bilhah Nitzan, *The Peshar Habakkuk Scroll* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1986), 40–42.

39 The term "recontextualization" plays a prominent role in the work of Nitzan, *Peshar*, 51–54; Shani Berrin (Tzoref), "Qumran Pesharim," in *Biblical Interpretation at Qumran*, ed. Matthias Henze, SDSSRL (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 110–33 (126–30); Lange and Pleše, "Qumran Pesharim and the Derveni Papyrus"; eidem, "Transpositional Hermeneutics."

40 André Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Preliminary Survey* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1952), 26.

41 Berrin (Tzoref), "Qumran Pesharim," 110.

himself,⁴² the term “application” is problematic as a description of this phenomenon. It implies the notion of a fixed history to which Scripture is then applied. But such a history is very difficult to recover, as it is shrouded in an intricate web of intertextual links between the pesharim and other writings.⁴³ These intertextual connections, which sometimes reflect a development in the use of terminology, suggest that what we find in the pesharim is not simply history, but the historical memory of the pesher commentators.⁴⁴ This historical memory informs the scriptural interpretations that the pesher commentators espouse and so reflects the commentators’ bestowing of their interests on their base texts. But the historical memory of the commentators is also informed by their reading of Scripture. In this context, Philip Davies suggests that some elements of the historical memory in the pesharim do not reflect actual historical circumstances, but are exegetically derived from Scripture.⁴⁵ Hence, the contents of the pesharim reflect the tension between base text and commentary as well. On the one hand, the pesharim develop their historical memory on the basis of their scriptural base texts, thus affirming the status of these base texts. On the other, the historical memory of the pesher commentators guides their expositions of their base texts, whose authority is thus superseded and replaced by that of the commentator.

The pesharim thus reflect the same tension between an authoritative base text and its need for interpretation as other commentaries. This tension is embedded in broader conceptualizations of the nature the base text and its interpretation. For the pesher commentators, history is divided up into periods

42 The mention of Demetrius and Antiochus in 4Q169 3–4 i 1–3 may be the clearest case.

43 George J. Brooke, “The Pesharim and the Origins of the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Methods of Investigation of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Khirbet Qumran Site: Present Realities and Future Prospects*, ed. Michael O. Wise et al., ANYAS 722 (New York: The New York Academy of Sciences, 1994), 339–53.

44 Philip R. Davies, “What History Can We Get from the Scrolls, and How?” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Texts and Context*, ed. Charlotte Hempel, STDJ 90 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 31–46; Loren T. Stuckenbruck, “The Teacher of Righteousness Remembered: From Fragmentary Sources to Collective Memory in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Memory in the Bible and Antiquity: The Fifth Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium (Durham, September 2004)*, ed. Stephen C. Barton, Loren T. Stuckenbruck, and Benjamin G. Wold, WUNT 212 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 75–94. For a concise overview see Pieter B. Hartog, “Pesharim,” in *The Dictionary of the Bible in Ancient Media*, ed. Chris L. Keith et al. (London: T&T Clark, 2017), 293–95.

45 *Behind the Essenes: History and Ideology in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, BJS 94 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 91–97.

(קצים). These periods are preordained by God and inform the course of history.⁴⁶ The last period or periods of history is known as “the latter days” (אחרית הימים) and will culminate in the final judgement.⁴⁷ As the recipient of divine revelation, the ancient prophet was granted insight in the period in which he lived. However, he did not gauge the fullest meaning of his revelation. His insights did not extend beyond his own time, nor did he survey the whole of history. The revelation that he received, however, did have the potential to illuminate more than just his own times. Originating with God, it could provide its able interpreter with insight into the divine plan of history. The pesher commentators, who lived in the latter days and looked back on earlier periods of history, were in the position to achieve this understanding of the whole of history, of which their days were the culmination. This temporal difference between the base text and the commentary is the *raison d'être* of scriptural exposition in the pesharim. Whereas the base text, perceived as it was to derive from divine revelation, is evidently authoritative for its commentators, its author was unable to assess its full meaning. This privilege was reserved for the readers of Scripture in the latter days—or perhaps for one such reader in particular.⁴⁸ These readers understood their own position in the course of history from Scripture.⁴⁹ It is in this fashion that “the view of

46 This idea is found elsewhere in the scrolls and Jewish literature. See, e.g., Ida Fröhlich, “Pesher, Apocalyptic Literature and Qumran,” in *The Madrid Qumran Congress*, ed. Julio Trebolle Barrera and Luis Vegas Montaner, STDJ 11 (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 1295–305; Florentino García Martínez, “Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, ed. Bernhard McGinn, John J. Collins, and Stephen J. Stein, 3 vols. (New York: Continuum, 1998), 1:162–92; Devorah Dimant, “Time, Torah and Prophecy at Qumran,” in *Religiöse Philosophie und philosophische Religion der frühen Kaiserzeit: Literaturgeschichtliche Perspektiven*, STAC 51 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 147–98; Shani Tzoref, “Pesher and Periodization,” *DSD* 18 (2011): 129–54; Michael E. Stone, “Apocalyptic Historiography,” in *Ancient Judaism: New Visions and Views* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 59–89.

47 Annette Steudel, “אחרית הימים in the Texts from Qumran,” *RevQ* 16/62 (1993): 225–44.

48 See the next section.

49 The expression “pesher on the periods” (פֶּשֶׁר עַל הַקְצִים; 4Q180 1 1) is important in this regard. Though the expression is not found in this form in the continuous pesharim (but cf. the phrase פֶּשֶׁר הַדָּבָר לְאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים in 4Q162 2:1; 4Q163 23 ii 10), it indicates the focus of this type of exposition, which is on the understanding of the course of history and the commentator’s own position therein. See Devorah Dimant, “The ‘Pesher on the Periods’ (4Q180) and 4Q181,” *IOS* 9 (1979): 77–102; eadem, “Exegesis and Time in the Pesharim from Qumran,” *REJ* 168 (2009): 373–93.

the prophetic text as ‘fore-telling’ results in an exegetical application that is ‘forth-telling.’”⁵⁰

Author and Commentator

Many commentators construe their authority in conversation with the base text author. The pesher commentators do not engage in direct conversation with the author of their base texts, though. Instead, they develop the image of the Teacher of Righteousness, who is portrayed as the instigator of pesher interpretation. This portrayal of the Teacher fulfils the role of implied commentator in the pesharim, with later commentators merely being heirs to the tradition the Teacher initiated. Thus, the pesher commentators appropriate the collective memory of the Teacher for themselves. Pesher exegesis, from this perspective, is authoritative because it is not the merit of the individual commentator, but derives from “the voice the Teacher.”⁵¹ The fact that the Teacher is mentioned only in some pesharim does not invalidate this statement. There can be a variety of reasons for the absence of the Teacher. The most noteworthy ones are the exegetical potential of the base text and the historical frame in which the commentary is set. Information about the Teacher is usually derived exegetically from the base text. Thus, the pesharim on Habakkuk and Psalm 37 concern themselves with the conflict between the Teacher of Righteousness and the Wicked Priest because their base texts refer to a conflict between the righteous and the wicked.⁵² Furthermore, different pesharim discuss different

50 George J. Brooke, “Prophetic Interpretation in the *Pesharim*,” in *A Companion to Biblical Interpretation in Early Judaism*, ed. Matthias Henze (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 235–54 (248).

51 Florentino García Martínez uses this phrase from the Damascus Document (CD 20:28, 32 [// 4Q267 3 7; 4Q270 2 i 2]) to illustrate how the image of the Teacher aids the accrual of authority in a variety of Qumran texts. See his “Beyond the Sectarian Divide: The ‘Voice of the Teacher’ as an Authority-Confering Strategy in some Qumran Texts,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Transmission of Traditions and Production of Texts*, ed. Sarianna Metso, Hindy Najman, and Eileen M. Schuller, STDJ 92 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 227–44, esp. 235: “The ‘voice of the Teacher’ as an authority-conferring strategy is not limited to the activity of the historical Teacher of Righteousness ... but ... was ‘institutionalized’ within the groups that took their inspiration from this figure and became the channel of a continuous revelation while expecting the final revelation at the end of times.”

52 For a concise discussion of how this works in Pesher Habakkuk see Pieter B. Hartog, “Re-Reading Habakkuk 2:4b: Lemma and Interpretation in 1QpHab VI 17–VIII 3,” *RevQ* 26/101 (2013): 127–32.

periods in the historical memory of their commentators. Whilst Peshar Habakkuk, for instance, is concerned primarily with an early phase of this historical memory of its commentators, Peshar Nahum focuses on a later phase. Assuming that the Teacher was remembered as a founding figure,⁵³ we need not be surprised that he features only in Peshar Habakkuk and not in Peshar Nahum. Even in the pesharim where it is not explicitly developed, however, the image of the Teacher functions as the implied commentator.⁵⁴

This is not to suggest that the voice of the later commentator completely recedes with that of the Teacher. When he occurs in the pesharim, the Teacher is always spoken *about*. He does not direct his voice directly, in the first person, to the readers of these commentaries. In that regard, the pesharim differ from some of the Hodayot, where the voice of the poet and the voice of the Teacher coincide. They are different also from the Temple Scroll, where the third person narrative of Scripture is rephrased in the first person to portray it as divine speech. The pesharim represent the voice of the Teacher, but the two do not merge. The type of exegesis we find in the Qumran commentaries portrays itself as belonging to the interpretive tradition started by the Teacher as both a continuation and a development of that tradition. This defines the type of scriptural interpretation that the pesharim contain as open-ended: the divine inspiration that the Teacher had received, which is the basis for this type of exegesis, did not come to a halt at his death, but was continued by his heirs, the peshar commentators.⁵⁵

53 4QpPs A 1–10 iii 14–17 and CD 1:10–11 reflect this aspect of the historical memory of the Teacher.

54 Some of the elements associated with the image of the Teacher as the instigator of peshar exegesis, such as his interpretive focus on prophetic works, are found also in pesharim where he is not mentioned.

55 The fact that only one copy of each peshar was recovered may suggest that these commentaries were added to in the course of their transmission. Cf. the comments of George J. Brooke, “Aspects of the Physical and Scribal Features of Some Cave 4 ‘Continuous’ Pesharim,” in Metso, Najman, and Schuller, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Transmission of Traditions and Production of Texts*, 133–50, esp. 140, also n. 28, and Jokiranta, *Social Identity*, 154. The possibility to include subsequent comments to already existing commentaries depends on the open-endedness of the tradition: rather than containing a closed collection of interpretations originating with the Teacher, the pesharim present a continuation and appropriation of the exegetical tradition which—according to the pesharim themselves—the Teacher instigated. See also Pieter B. Hartog, “‘The Final Priests of Jerusalem’ and ‘The Mouth of the Priest’: Eschatology and Literary History in *Peshar Habakkuk*,” *DSD* 24 (2017): 59–80.

In the pesharim, the tension between the author and the interpreter of the base text plays a similar role to other commentaries. It functions on the level of the implied rather than the actual commentator. One way in which it comes to the fore is the fact that the Teacher of Righteousness is never called a prophet. In the light of the tension between author and commentator which I sketched in the first part of this essay, the hesitation of the peshar commentators to call the Teacher a prophet can be understood as a differentiation of his function from that of the base text author. Rather than a prophet, the Teacher is called a priest.⁵⁶ One of the main functions of priests was the interpretation and instruction of Scripture—especially the law, but Peshar Habakkuk 2:5–10 indicates that priests can also be involved in the interpretation of the prophets.⁵⁷ Thus portraying the Teacher as a priest, the peshar commentators emphasize his exegetical role. This may also be the import of the application of Ps 45:2, where the Psalmist describes his tongue as “the pen of a skilled scribe,” to the Teacher.⁵⁸ In Sluiter’s terms, the Teacher is not said to be a “colleague of the base text author.” Instead, he belongs to “the tradition of commentators.” Put differently: he is not a fellow prophet, but an exegete who approaches his base text from a distance so as to make sense of it. He supersedes the base text author as he illumines the meaning of the base text in ways that were impossible for the ancient prophet.

But this is only one side of the coin. Like other commentators, the implied commentator in the pesharim is not wholly disengaged. Apart from an interpreter, the Teacher is also a colleague of the ancient prophet. Despite the fact that the Teacher is nowhere called a prophet, his exegesis can to a certain extent be characterized as prophetic. As the peshar commentators expound

56 The clearest case is 4QpPs A 1–10 iii 14–17. Most scholars would also point to 1QpHab 2:5–10, but with García Martínez (“Beyond,” 241) I doubt the equation of “the priest” in that passage with the Teacher. See Hartog, “‘The Final Priests of Jerusalem’ and ‘The Mouth of the Priest.’”

57 On priests as exegetes and teachers see, e.g., Steven D. Fraade, “Interpretive Authority in the Studying Community at Qumran,” *JJS* 44 (1993): 46–69; Florentino García Martínez, “Priestly Functions in a Community without a Temple,” in *Gemeinde ohne Tempel: Zur Substituierung und Transformation des Jerusalemer Tempels und seines Kults im Alten Testament, antiken Judentum und frühen Christentum*, ed. Beate Ego and Kathrin Ehlers, WUNT 118 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 303–19, esp. 309–11; George J. Brooke, “The ‘Apocalyptic’ Community, the Matrix of the Teacher and Rewriting Scripture,” in *Authoritative Scriptures in Ancient Judaism*, ed. Mladen Popović, *JSJSup* 141 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 37–53, esp. 44–47.

58 4QpPs A 1–10 iv 26–27. Cf. Alex P. Jassen, *Mediating the Divine: Prophecy and Revelation in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Second Temple Judaism*, *STDJ* 68 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 350.

their prophetic base texts, they partially align themselves with their authors. This prophetic element of pesher exegesis is clear in the explicit reflections on the nature of this type of exegesis in Pesher Habakkuk. In column 2 of 1QpHab, “the words of the Teacher of Righteousness” are said to stem “from the mouth of God.”⁵⁹ This illustrates that the interpretations of the Teacher of Righteousness originate from divine revelation. Just as the words of the ancient prophet result from God, so the Teacher’s—and hence the pesher commentators’—understanding of their fuller meaning is of divine origin. The revelation imparted on the Teacher granted him insight in “all the mysteries of the words of his servants the prophets.”⁶⁰ These mysteries comprise the meaning of the ancient prophet’s words for the latter days. As we have seen above, the position of the Teacher of Righteousness in the final phase of history grants him a fuller insight into these words than their original receiver had. Thus, the revelation given to the ancient prophet is also given more fully to the Teacher. As such, the Teacher continues the revelation bestowed upon the base text author. He is portrayed in line with the ancient prophet and offers an inspired interpretation of his words. The Teacher engages in revelatory exegesis, but he is not called a prophet, which indicates his other, simultaneous role as an exegete.⁶¹

In the early years of pesher research, the dual role of the Teacher and his exegesis informed a dichotomy between scholars who emphasized the revelatory nature of these commentaries and those who illustrated their exegetical nature.⁶² In modern-day scholarship, there is a wide-spread assumption that the revelation bestowed upon the Teacher is of a different kind than that received by the ancient prophet. The divine inspiration of the Teacher is not unmediated, but mediated by his use of exegetical strategies. “The interpretation of ancient prophetic Scripture emerges as a new mode of divine

59 מפיא אל. See 1QpHab 2:2.

60 את כול רזי דברי עבדיו הנביאים. See 1QpHab 2:8–9; 7:4–5 (with small differences).

61 For a nuanced discussion of prophetic elements in the portrayal of the Teacher see George J. Brooke, “Was the Teacher of Righteousness considered to be a Prophet?” in *Prophecy after the Prophets?* 77–97. Brooke suggests another reason for the fact that the Teacher is never explicitly called a prophet: “It is possible ... that the absence of the label prophet for the Teacher of Righteousness was a deliberate strategem ... to enable the inclusion of those within the movement either who would have had difficulty in identifying the Teacher as a prophet or as the eschatological prophet” (95). This explanation does not exclude the one provided here.

62 The first strain of thinking is particularly associated with the work of Karl Elliger, the second with the work of William H. Brownlee. To get an idea of the early discussion one may compare Brownlee, “Biblical Interpretation” with Elliger, *Studien*, 157–64.

revelation.”⁶³ The tension between the Teacher and the ancient prophet—that is, between the commentator and the author of the base text—must be situated within this broader framework. The tension between the Teacher as an exegete and the Teacher as an inspired individual corresponds with broader developments in the appreciation of prophecy in Judaism of this period.

The dual portrayal of the Teacher reflects an awareness of the dual nature of the prophetic base text as both human and divine, and both oral and written, as well. This comes to the fore most evidently in Hab 2:1–2 and its interpretation in 1QpHab 7. In the scriptural base text, the revelation which Habakkuk receives, is oral:⁶⁴ God is said to “speak” (אמר, דבר) and to “answer” (שוב; ענה). Habakkuk writes down (כתב) the vision and engraves it on tablets (באר) for the sake of the reader (קורא). Thus, the vision conveyed in the book of Habakkuk—the base text of the pesher—is of a dual kind.⁶⁵ It also invites dual interpretation. On the one hand, orally delivered divine revelation is interpreted in ways which are reminiscent of the interpretations of dreams and visions.⁶⁶ The interpreter of this revelation also partakes in it, and thus obtains insight into the meaning of its contents. On the other hand, the base text is a written text and is to be interpreted as such—by putting the reading strategies that are available to the commentator to good use. The reader becomes an exegete. The Teacher embodies these two roles. He also reflects the dual nature of the base text in his own activity, as he is both a reader of the prophetic word (1QpHab 7:3–5) and speaks with “the reply of the tongue” and “purposeful

63 Jassen, *Mediating*, 352.

64 George J. Brooke, “Les mystères des prophètes et les oracles d'exégèse: Continuité et discontinuité dans la prophétie à Qumran,” in *Comment devient-on prophète? Actes du colloque organisé par le Collège de France, Paris, les 4–5 avril 2011*, ed. Jean-Marie Durand, Thomas Römer, and Micaël Bürki, OBO 265 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 159–66 (161–63) points to the use of the verbs צפ”ה and רא”ה in Hab 2:1–2 and suggests that Habakkuk’s prophetic activity entails a visual aspect as well.

65 Cf. Michael H. Floyd, “Prophecy and Writing in Habakkuk 2,1–5,” *ZAW* 105 (1993): 462–81. Floyd describes the kind of writing described in Hab 2:1–5 as mantic writing, which is a part of prophetic activity. This is helpful for how we describe the base text of the pesharim, as it illustrates that a written text can be prophetically laden.

66 See, e.g., Armin Lange, “Interpretation als Offenbarung: Zum Verhältnis von Schriftauslegung und Offenbarung in apokalyptischer und nichtapokalyptischer Literatur,” in *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Biblical Tradition*, ed. Florentino García Martínez, BETL 168 (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 17–33; Nissinen, “Pesharim as Divination”; Jassen, “Pesharim.”

speech" (4QpPs A 1–10 iv 27–v 1).⁶⁷ Thus, the Teacher of Righteousness interprets and extends the words and works of the ancient prophet. The pesher commentators, in their turn, invoke the image of the Teacher to accrue authority for themselves.

Dependency and Rivalry

A third set of oppositions is that between the commentator's dependency on other interpreters and his rivalry with them. As they constitute a traditional genre, many commentaries incorporate the findings of other commentators. By so doing, they situate themselves within an interpretive tradition. There is ample evidence for such procedures in the pesharim. Take, for instance, the expression "the Teacher of Righteousness," which features in some pesharim. The term is taken from Hos 10:12 and Joel 2:23. But its use in the pesharim is not the result of an unmediated interpretation of Scripture. Rather, it is mediated by the use of similar expressions in the Damascus Document. Similar developments underlie the use of other terms or sobriquets in the pesharim.⁶⁸ The traditional nature of the pesharim is reflected also on the level of other exegetical traditions. Moshe Bernstein discusses the link between Pesher Hosea A 2:15–17 and Jub. 6:34–38.⁶⁹ The figurative reading of "dust" in Hab 1:10 as a large group of people which 1QpHab 4:3–9 offers, is not unique to the pesher, either. A similar metaphorical reading occurs in the Targum to Hab 1:10 and probably goes back to the use of "dust" for people in scriptural passages like Gen 3:19.⁷⁰ These examples, to which many more could be added,⁷¹ show that the pesharim are no *sui generis* commentaries, but partake in broader exegetical traditions which incorporate Scripture, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and Early Jewish literature. Hence, the pesher commentators depend on the work of other and previous interpreters and incorporate the findings of other interpreters in their own commentaries.

67 Cf. Brooke, "Apocalyptic' Community," 41–42.

68 See, e.g., Matthew A. Collins, *The Use of Sobriquets in the Qumran Dead Sea Scrolls*, LSTS 67 (London: T&T Clark, 2009).

69 Moshe Bernstein, "'Walking in the Feasts of the Gentiles': 4QpHosea^a 2.15–17 and *Jubilees* 6.34–38," *JSP* 9 (1991): 21–34.

70 See Nitzan, *Pesher*, 44–45; Robert P. Gordon, *Studies in the Targum to the Twelve Prophets*, VTSup 51 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 85.

71 Shani Tzoref, "Qumran Pesharim and the Pentateuch: Explicit Citation, Overt Typologies, and Implicit Interpretive Traditions," *DSD* 16 (2009): 190–220 gives some examples from the Pentateuch.

At the same time, the pesher commentators, like other commentators, do not seek merely to repeat the work of their peers. The *raison d'être* for their own work is that they have something new to say. They may incorporate the work of other interpreters, but they ultimately surpass them. The portrayal of the Teacher of Righteousness—the implied commentator in these commentaries—as uniquely inspired and granted insight in the mysteries of the divine revelation imparted on the ancient prophets is the clearest reflection of this self-awareness of the Qumran commentaries. But the pesharim also engage in forthright condemnations of rival interpreters. The objects of this condemnation differ from pesher to pesher.⁷² Yet, what they have in common is that they are not rebuked only for expounding fallacious interpretations. Accusations of deceptive interpretation function within a larger complex of condemnations of opponents in the pesharim, which aims to “justify the group’s existence and claims by placing the most relevant out-groups as the opposite of the in-group.”⁷³ Because a substantial part of “the group’s claims” is exegetically derived from Scripture, it need not surprise us that condemnations of out-groups involves accusing them of deceitful interpretation.

The main antagonists of the Teacher of Righteousness in Pesher Habakkuk are “the Man of the Lie” (אִישׁ הַכֹּזֵב) and “the Wicked Priest” (כֹּהֵן הָרָשָׁע). The first is portrayed in 1QpHab 2:1–3 as the leader of a group of traitors which is accused of not believing “the words of the Teacher of Righteousness from the mouth of God.”⁷⁴ Thus, the Man of the Lie and his followers reject the Teacher’s inspired interpretation. Elsewhere, the Man of the Lie is portrayed as rejecting the Torah.⁷⁵ Pesher Habakkuk does not refer to the exposition of rival interpretations by the Man of the Lie, though that type of activity does seem to be implied in the references to this individual in 4QpPs A. In contrast with the Man of the Lie, the “Spouter of the Lie” (מְטִיף הַכֹּזֵב) is presented as a rival interpreter in 1QpHab 10:5–13.⁷⁶ The Spouter of the Lie is not portrayed to be in direct conflict with the Teacher, but he does play the role of his negative counterpart. In this passage in Pesher Habakkuk, the Spouter is said to build a city—which

72 Cf. Samuel Adams’s contribution (pp. 47–50) in this volume.

73 Jokiranta, *Social Identity*, 137.

74 מורה הצדקה מפּיֵא אֵל [דברי].

75 1QpHab 5:11.

76 As I am not interested in reconstructing history from Pesher Habakkuk, the issue of whether the Man of the Lie and the Spouter of the Lie are the same person does not affect my argument much.

is a metaphor for the foundation of a religious movement⁷⁷—and to misdirect many. This focus on misdirection (תע"ה) and lying (שק"ר) implies that the Spouter of the Lie expounds teachings and interpretations which conflict with the teachings and interpretations of the Teacher of Righteousness. The pesher commentator further emphasizes the contrast between the two teachers as he uses the root יר"ה to refer to the activities of the Spouter of the Lie: he is stated "to teach them deceitful works."⁷⁸ Using the same root for the activity of both figures, the commentator depicts the Spouter of the Lie as the negative counterpart of the Teacher, thus accentuating the veracity and authority of the teachings and interpretations of the latter.

Protagonists change in Pesher Nahum, since neither the Teacher nor his opponents from Pesher Habakkuk occur in this pesher. Condemnation is now directed against the Seekers of Smooth Things (דורשי החלקות). Their portrayal as rival interpreters affects their name, which is a pun on the term "the interpreter of the law" (דורש התורה). Pesher Nahum 3–4 ii 2 portrays these rival interpreters as "walking in treachery and lies."⁷⁹ Further down in the same column, the Seekers of Smooth Things must be taken as "the ones who misdirect Ephraim, who with their fraudulent teaching and lying tongue and perfidious lip misdirect many; kings, princes, priests and people together with the proselyte attached to them" (4Q169 3–4 ii 8–9). Thus, Pesher Nahum, like Pesher Habakkuk, depicts rival interpreters as misleaders in order to promote the status and validity of its own contents.

4QPesher Psalms A, lastly, speaks of the "Interpreter of Knowledge" (מליץ) in 1–10 i 25–ii 1. Most scholars equate the Interpreter of Knowledge with the Teacher of Righteousness because the opponent of the Interpreter of Knowledge and one of the opponents of the Teacher in Pesher Habakkuk are the same. The use of the term "Interpreter of Knowledge" instead of "Teacher of Righteousness" can then be attributed to the exegetical link between lemma and interpretation in 4QpPs A 1–10 i 25–ii 1.⁸⁰ Though this may be a rather weak basis for identification, the dynamics underlying this passage are similar to those in other pesharim. In 4QPesher Psalms A, the teachings of the Man

77 David Flusser, "Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes in Pesher Nahum," in *Judaism of the Second Temple Period*, 2 vols., trans. Azzan Yadin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 1:214–57, esp. 222–23.

78 להורותם במ[ע] שי שקר. There has been some discussion on what root the infinitive להורותם may be based. See William H. Brownlee, *The Midrash Pesher of Habakkuk*, SBLMS 24 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979), 171–72.

79 בכחש ושקר[ים י]תהלכו.

80 Brooke, "Biblical Texts," 94 suggests a link between the form מצליח in the lemma and מליץ in the interpretation.

of the Lie are referred to as “words of lies” (אמרי שקר) and “worthless things” (קלוֹת). The latter term brings to mind the phrase חלקות “smooth things,” which describes the deceitful contents of the teachings of the Seekers of Smooth Things in Peshar Nahum. The Man of Lie, misleading many as he did, and his followers did not heed the words of the Interpreter of Knowledge. Thus, 4QPeshar Psalms A, too, implies a special validity for its own contents, which it underscores by presenting rival interpreters in an especially negative light.

This illustrates that the attitude of the peshar commentators towards other interpreters is ambiguous. On the one hand, the Peshar commentators are clearly indebted to the work of their peers—also of those whose work has been preserved outside of the Dead Sea Scrolls—and incorporate the results of their work in their own commentaries. On the other hand, both their self-portrayal as engaging in inspired interpretation in the vein of the Teacher of Righteousness and their condemnation of those holding different opinions purposefully distinguish the results of peshar exegesis from those of other types of interpretation.

Conclusion

The observations in the preceding pages illustrate that the pesharim promote their authority and validity in a type of dynamics similar to that in other commentaries. It can be described in terms of a variety of sets of oppositions between which the commentators foster the validity of their work. The peshar commentators, like all others, must steer their course between reiterating and subverting their base texts; between aligning themselves with the author of their base text and approaching his work as an exegete; and between incorporating the work of other interpreters and having something new to say. It is between these poles that the pesharim accrue their own authority. The way in which the pesharim negotiate these sets of oppositions differs from how other commentaries negotiate them. Hence, the route that the Qumran commentaries take between these extremes determines their characteristic features.⁸¹

81 On the level of the individual pesharim there are differences in how these sets of oppositions are handled. The pesharim differ, for instance, in their presentation of rival interpreters (who are condemned in which peshar?) or their approach towards the base text (some pesharim are strictly continuous, others tend to be more thematic). This shows that the group of “continuous pesharim” is not a neat unity. This has been noted before; see especially Moshe Bernstein, “Introductory Formulas for Citation and Re-Citation of Biblical Verses in the Qumran Pesharim: Observations on a Peshar Technique,” *DSD* 1 (1994): 30–70.

These observations can be taken in two ways. Firstly, they invite us to think more broadly about the connections between the pesharim and other Early Jewish interpretive writings that exhibit the same type of dynamics. Secondly, they invite cross-cultural comparisons of the way in which this type of dynamics surfaces in interpretive writings which, like the pesharim, display a clear distinction of lemma and interpretation and consist of an alternation of these two elements. In both ways, the observations in the preceding pages aim to illuminate both the nature of the pesharim and their position within the wider context of commentary writing in the ancient world.