Pesher and Periodization

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Abstract
This study re-examines the use of the term pesher, and the related root רָפָא, in Qumran compositions, and their significance with respect to conceptions of determinism and periodization in the corpus. It discusses how the treatment of the book of Genesis in 4Q180, 4Q252, and the Admonitions sections of the Damascus Document reflect a worldview and hermeneutic that are generally associated with the continuous and thematic pesharim at Qumran. Pesher compositions reveal how scripture is fulfilled in current events. These related works demonstrate the fulfillment of the divine grand plan in scripture and past events. It is suggested that these texts share a “performative” aspect: in all of these compositions, the act of transmitting divinely-revealed knowledge is as much an actualization and fulfillment of eschatological expectations as the unfolding social and political history that is tied to the texts.

Keywords
pesher; periodization; Jubilees; 4Q252; 4Q180; Qumran; performative texts

1 This article is the last of a series of three publications based upon a paper I delivered at the Fifteenth World Congress of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem, in August 5, 2009. The oral presentation was entitled, “4Q252 and the Heavenly Tablets.” The first of these articles will appear in a Festschrift dedicated to the memory of Prof. Hanan Eshel: Shani Tzoref, “4Q252: Listenwissenschaft and Covenantal Patriarchal Blessings,” in “Go Out and Study the Land” (Judg 18:2): Historical and Archaeological Studies in Honor of Hanan Eshel (ed. Aren Maeir, Jodi Magness, and Lawrence H. Schiffman; Leiden: Brill, forthcoming). The second article is “Covenantal Election in 4Q252 and Jubilees’ Heavenly Tablets,” DSD 18 (2011): 74–89. I am grateful to Prof. Eibert Tigchelaar, Prof. Moshe Bernstein, and Prof. Hanan Eshel ל for their feedback on drafts of these publications, and to the anonymous reviewers of DSD for their very helpful comments on this article.
The Qumran pesharim are generally considered classic exemplars of “sectarian” writings, featuring the distinctive terminology, socio-political alignments, and theological beliefs that characterize the Qumran community. Examination of the use of the term pesher, and the related root פֶּשֶׁר, in non-pesher compositions from Qumran can help us understand broader traditions that underlie the theology expressed in the pesharim. In the first section of this study, I demonstrate that 4Q180 (Pesher on the Periods A), 4Q252 (Commentary on Genesis A), and the Admonitions sections of the Damascus Document share core mythical conceptions of determinism and periodization, especially as pertaining to a belief in eternal records engraved on Heavenly Tablets. In the second section, I explore the philological significance of the use of פֶּשֶׁר/פֶּשֶׁר in these compositions. Finally, I conclude with a brief re-assessment of Qumran pesher.

1. Dualistic Determinism: From Urzeit to Endzeit

In the following discussion, I build primarily upon the work of Devorah Dimant, as well as that of Ida Fröhlich. The periodized schematization of

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3 Unless otherwise stated, citations and English translations of Qumran texts are taken from The Dead Sea Scrolls Reader (Vols. 1–6; ed. Donald W. Parry and Emanuel Tov; Leiden: Brill, 2004–2005). For CD, I have relied upon the text and translation in Joseph M. Baumgarten and Daniel R. Schwartz, “Damascus Document,” in PTSDSSP 2:4–57, with some modification.

history is a hallmark of “historical apocalypses,” but the belief is also attested in contemporary Jewish writings of other genres.

It is prominent in a variety of compositions preserved at Qumran, including some of the distinctive sectarian works. A significant component of the Qumran community’s self-perception is the belief that its members have been given privileged access to divinely-revealed knowledge, concerning both halakah and transcendental existential realities. The progressive

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5 Thus, e.g., Daniel; the Apocalypse of Weeks and the Animal Apocalypse in 1 Enoch; and 4 Ezra. See John J. Collins, The Apocalyptic Imagination (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 6–7.

attainment of revelation concerning God’s plan served simultaneously as cause, effect, and aim of their way of life.7 Among the community’s eschatological beliefs was the idea that history would culminate with perfect knowledge of the law8 and of God’s mysteries.9 Chief among the secrets that are revealed over time, is the divine system of proper calendrical calculation and of reward and punishment. Dimant observed that in Qumran sectarian works, “allusions mentioning Periods and generations… usually appear in the context of predestination teaching.”10 She further


8 See, e.g., CD 12: 22–13:1, “And this (is) the rule for the settlers of [the] camps… until the rising of the Messiah of Aaron and Israel”11; 1QS 9:9–11, “They shall deviate from none of the teachings of the Law, whereby they would walk in their willful heart completely. They shall govern themselves using the original precepts by which the men of the Yahad began to be instructed, doing so until there come the Prophet and the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel.” (In viewing this statement as a reference to anticipation of perfect knowledge of the law, I follow, inter alia, Jacob Licht, The Rule Scroll: A Scroll from the Wilderness of Judea (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1965), ad loc, 190 and 188 [Hebrew]; and Joseph M. Baumgarten, “Mutability and Immutability in Sectarian Law,” in idem, Qumran Cave 4. XIII: The Damascus Document (4Q266–273) (DJD 18; Oxford; Clarendon, 1996), 16–18. Contra Daniel R. Schwartz, “Qumran and Early Christianity,” in Kister, ed., The Qumran Scrolls and Their World, 2:613–28 at 625 [Hebrew].

9 On conceptions of the end of days in sectarian writings, see Cana Werman, “Eschatology at Qumran,” in Kister, ed., The Qumran Scrolls and Their World, 2:529–49 [Hebrew]. The association between knowledge and experience of historical and eschatological fulfillment is also found in related circles. Cf. Jub. 23, and the discussion of this text by James L. Kugel, “The Jubilees Apocalypse,” DSD 1 (1994): 322–37. Werman cites this chapter as well (ibid., 540), but she views Jubilees as a Qumran sectarian work.

noted that the “mysteries and great deeds of God: the planning, creating and managing of the universe . . . are the subject of the sect’s special knowledge and are revealed only through divine inspiration.”

A particular interest in the initial and final periods of human history, with a distinct dualistic perspective, characterizes 4Q180, the Admonitions of the Damascus Document, and 4Q252. Table 1 illustrates the similarity in the specific events presented in these different lists, which also align with the events found in the non-legal passages attributed to the Heavenly Tablets in the Book of Jubilees.


The episode of the Watchers is not one of the events explicitly attributed to the Heavenly Tablets in Jubilees, but see Jub. 4:22–24, where it is written of Enoch that “he testified to the Watchers, who had sinned with the daughters of men… and we led him into the Garden of Eden for (his) greatness and honour. Now he is there writing down the condemnation and judgment of the world, and all the wickedness of the children of mankind.” Translation from James C. VanderKam, The Book of Jubilees (Leuven: Peeters, 1989), 27–28.

The similarity in the selection of passages from Genesis in the comparanda points to a common underlying tradition. The alignment across the four compositions is not absolute, and there is some variation that reflects the distinctive character of each. The Damascus Document and 4Q180 are interested in the ante-diluvian period, which is not reflected in the other compilations;16 The Damascus Document is not interested in any of the discontinued patriarchal lines of Lot, Ishmael, and Esau that are represented in 4Q252 and the Jubilees testimonies.17 But it is clear that all of the

16 Marcus Tso observes an important difference between these parallel sections of CD and 4Q180. Significant weight is given to free will in the passage in CD, following Deut 29:8 (“walking in the stubbornness of their heart”) and its reverberations in Jeremiah. 4Q180 seems more similar to 1 Enoch and Jubilees in blaming the fallen angels for the introduction of evil into the world. See Marcus Tso, “The Uses of Scriptural Traditions at Qumran for the Construction of Ethics,” in The Hebrew Bible in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls (ed. Armin Lange et al.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, forthcoming). On the proposal that the centrality of extreme dualistic determinism, once considered foundational to Qumran thought, may actually be a late development in the thought of the community, see Charlotte Hempel, “The Teaching on the Two Spirits and the Literary Development of the Rule of the Community,” in Dualism in Qumran (ed. Geza Xeravits; LSTS; London: T & T Clark, 2010), 102–20.

17 Thus, 4Q180 2–4 and 8 ii 5–7; Jub. 16:9; 20: 5–6; T. Naph. 3:4. Eibert Tigchelaar surmises that the reason for the omission of Sodom from the dualistic historical review in CD is that the men of Sodom were not part of the Covenant. See Eibert Tigchelaar, “Sodom and Gomorrah and the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in Sodom’s Sin: Genesis 18–19 and Its Interpretations (ed. Ed Noort and Eibert Tigchelaar; TBN 7; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 47–62 (50). His rationale may be supported by the association of Sodom with the Watchers in 4Q180, Jub. 20, and T. Naph., and
texts are interested in tracing history through periods, and in reading Genesis with a sensitivity to a dualistic assessment of humanity as friends or enemies of God, and to resultant punishment or reward. The concept of covenant is central in all of these texts. In the extant text of 4Q252, this worldview is largely implicit. The other works offer more self-conscious descriptions of their agendas. Thus, 4Q180 begins with the following title and introduction:

*Pesher concerning the Periods* made by God, (each) Period in order to terminate [all that is] and all that will be. Before he created them, he set up their activities…, one Period after another. And it is *engraved on the Tablets* [of Heaven… according to all(?)] the Periods of their dominions.\(^{18}\)

In comparing the *Damascus Document* to 4Q180, both Dimant and Fröhlich focused upon the list of sinners and righteous represented above in Table 1, which is found in the section of the *Damascus Document* conventionally identified as the “Third Admonition” in the exhortatory portion of the composition. The previous section of CD 2, the “Second Admonition” of 2:7–13, is also important in this context:

before they were established he knew their works. And he despised the generations (in which) they [stood] and hid his face from the land from (…) until their completion. And he knew the years they would stand and the number(s) and detail(s) of *their periods* ( والسرا وتورش עז נה יבום) of all that exist for eternity and that which unfolds until what will come ( רע המ בוא in *their periods*) (בכטראות [wacat] of all the years of eternity. And during all of them (God) raised up for himself those called by name so as to leave a remnant for the land and to fill the face of the world from their seed *vacat* And he informed them

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\(^{18}\) Translation from Dimant, “Pesher on the Periods” [italics are mine—ST].

with the non-elect line of Lot in *Jub.* 16. It is precisely their non-covenantal status that is useful to the authors of these texts. See Tzoref, “Covenantal Election,” 85–88; and see Tigchelaar’s comments on the use of the Sodom narrative in the “actualizing or eschatological exegesis” of 4Q177 4 10 (ibid., 60–62). Compare the treatment of Lot in *Jubilees* to that in Wisd 10:1–14, where Lot appears in a list of righteous patriarchs: “[Wisdom] rescued a righteous man [Lot] when the ungodly were perishing; he escaped the fire that descended on the Five Cities.” See James L. Kugel, “Jubilees, Philo, and the Problem of Genesis,” in Lange et al., eds., *The Hebrew Bible in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (forthcoming).
by the hand of the anointed of his holy spirit and the seers of his truth, of the details of their names. But those whom he hated, he caused to stray.

1.1 Revelation Concerning Engraved Periods

In the Second Admonition of the Damascus Document just cited, the history of mankind is described as known eternally by God, according to set periods (קציהם ופרסום מספר). The text asserts the belief that God reveals knowledge of the unfolding of these periods (행א הקצים) to elect men, informing them (וידעם) by means of prophets, and that He explicitly names the elect—as is done in the texts in Table 1, above. When 4Q180...
outlines some of these designated times, the periods (קצים) of humanity, it seems to refer to two of these periods in particular: a set of ten generations beginning with Noah and ending with Abraham, and another period beginning with Abraham. This same division is found in 4Q252, where the division between Noah and Abraham is highlighted by the use of vacats in the extant manuscript. This use of the term קץ, particularly in collocation with ב, to indicate divine revelation concerning the unfolding of human history, is shared by three of the compositions in our table, appearing in CD 2:7 and 4Q180, and in the difficult phrase ב א קץ לנהו in 4Q252.

21 Cf. m. Abot 5:2–3, which similarly connects the concepts of periodization and reward and punishment with these generations: “Ten generations were there from Adam to Noah, to show how great was His long-suffering; for all the generations were provoking him, till He brought the deluge upon them. Ten generations were there from Noah to Abraham, to show how great was His long-suffering; for all the generations were provoking Him till Abraham our father came, and received the reward of them all.” Cf. Tzoref, “4Q252: Lisenwissenschaft.”

22 Lim discusses the connection between this phrase in 4Q252 and Gen 6:13 קץ מברesar בל פלמי (NRSV: “I have determined to make an end of all flesh”). See Timothy H. Lim, “The Chronology of the Flood Story in a Qumran Text,” JJS 43 (1992): 288–98 at 291. Given the technical use of the term קץ in the Qumran corpus, and the nature of 4Q252, it seems most reasonable to view the phrase as both responding to Gen 6:13 and deliberately employing a theologically loaded term. There are six occurrences of the term קץ in the Noah pericope of 4Q252. Scholars who have sought thematic unity in 4Q252 have struggled with the problem of how to fit this long chronological passage into the composition as a whole. Some light is shed on this question when we view 4Q252 as a composition concerned with revelation, calculation, and the fulfillment of predicted times and episodes of punishment and salvation. Just as the pesher concerning Reuben in this work relates to the actualization of a predetermined event—in that case, a punishment for sin (see below), so too does the enumeration of set periods in the Noah pericope, as well as the chronology of Abram’s travels in the following section. This would account for the content of the pericope, but not the difference in style from the rest of the work. For an attempt to account for the multi-generic character of 4Q252, see George J. Brooke’s observations about anthologies as a vehicle of expression for marginal groups, in “Genre Theory, Rewritten Bible and Pesher,” DSD 17 (2010): 361–86 at 385. He cites Cynthia G. Franklin, Writing Women’s Communities: The Politics and Poetics of Contemporary Multi-Genre Anthologies (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 10.
According to 4Q180, these periods, which were known before creation, were engraved on Tablets (1 3). The specific language of engraving periods ($קץ$ + $חקק$) is not found in the extant Hebrew passages of Jubilees from Qumran, where the concept of recording divisions of time is expressed with the terms $כתב$ and $העתים$ $מחלקות$abyrinth. The imagery of the engraving of historical periods is found elsewhere in sectarian Qumran compositions in 1QpHab 7:13–14 (“all the times fixed by God will come in due course as He ordained that they should be by his inscrutable insight”); 1QH* 9:25–26:24 The imagery of the engraving of historical periods is found elsewhere in sectarian Qumran compositions in 1QpHab 7:13–14 (“all the times fixed by God will come in due course as He ordained that they should be by his inscrutable insight”); 1QH* 9:25–26 

For they can neither come before or after their appointed times and he ordained a period of wrath for a people that knows him not, and he established [times of] favour for those that seek his commandments).  

23 4Q247 has been convincingly restored as referring to an “engraved period” in line 1, $_hotem$ $cred$ $חקץ$ $השמים$ $בלוחות$. See Magen Broshi, “4Q247. 4QPesher on the Apocalypse of Weeks,” DJD 36:187–91. The designation “the 5th week” in 4Q247 2 is followed by historical references to 400 years and the Solomonic Temple, Zedekiah king of Judah, and perhaps the Return to Zion. Since this corresponds to the framework of the Apocalypse of Weeks in 1Enoch 93:2, Broshi followed Milik (Books of Enoch, 256) in naming the composition Pesher on the Apocalypse of Weeks. There is no definitive evidence, however, of textual dependence upon 1 Enoch in this passage, or of any shared antecedent tradition. 4Q247 might be another exemplar of a sort of pesher on historical periods like 4Q180, but it is not a pesher commentary on a specific text. 4Q369 (Prayer of Enosh) also refers to engraved periods, associated with antediluvian figures. Cf. Harold W. Attridge and John Strugnell, “Prayer of Enoch,” DJD 13:353–62.  

24 4Q216 1:11; 4Q217 2 1. Cf. the references to the book of Jubilees in CD 16:3–4, 4Q384 9 2; $כת$ $מחלקות$ $논ים$ $לוניבלאכ$ $שבורות$ $מהול$ occurs in 4Q228 (Text with a Citation of Jubilees) in 1 i 2, 4, 7 and the expression $כת$ $מחלקות$ $רהכ$ $בהול$ $מחלקות$ in line 9 is probably a reference to the book of Jubilees.  


26 This translation follows Joseph M. Baumgarten’s rendering in 4Q266 ad loc.; in 4Q268 he translated the restored parallel as “[that he has not known].”
The thematic pesher 4Q177 (4QEschatological Commentary B; Catena A; Midrash zur Eschatologie) describes predetermined historical periods as having been engraved on [Heavenly] Tablets. The text is not very well-preserved, but it is clear that the key ideas in the passage relate to eternal blessing, fathers and sons, the specification of names, and revealed knowledge:

and they shall be exalted by them for ever, and he shall bless them [†] old that for ever he would bless them [ ] epochs (קץ) be [ful/filled [ ] their fathers [ ] clearly set out by name (メフラシュ שםות), man by man [ ] their [y]ears and the epoch (קץ) of their existence [ ] their tongues [ ] of[t] ring of. Now, behold, everything is written on the tablets (ברוחו señס) which[ ] and he taught him (יווינע) the number of […] (4Q177 1–4 10–12)

1.2 Performative Contemporization

From the current state of the cited passage of 4Q177, it is unclear just which individuals are specified by name. It may be the elect of every generation. The specification of names in 4Q177 is like that in CD 2:13 cited above, and the similar CD 4:4 (with פרוש מפשים), which seem to have been written as introductions to lists of the members of the community, though the lists themselves have not survived.27

CD 4: 3–5 reads:

And the “sons of Zadok” are the chosen ones of Israel, those called by name, who stand in the end of days (באהריית רומם). Here are the detail(s) of their names (פרוש שמותיהם), in their generations and the time(s) of their standing (קץ מעמיד), and the number(s) of their trou-
bles and the years of their residence, and the detail(s) of their works (פירוש מעשיים)

The specification of the names of the contemporary elect is analogous to the revelations concerning the specified figures in earliest times. In his discussion of 4Q180–181, Campbell suggests that “this preoccupation with Genesis probably stems from the Qumran sect’s conviction that the traditions concerned were paradigmatic of their own day.” 28 Grossman states more forcefully:

For the author/editor(s) of the Damascus Document, the narrative of history is complex, but its secrets and true meanings are accessible to anyone with the right covenantal knowledge. The various histories in the text—cosmic, national, sectarian—could all be understood by a given covenanter as reflections of his own—personal—history; his own history, in turn, could be read in terms of these larger narratives. 29

I would like to suggest that this personal identification with patriarchal narrative history operated beyond the conceptual or descriptive level in the Damascus Document. In addition to serving “informative” functions, CD 2:1 and 4:4–5 exhibit a “performative” dimension, which would have been even more profound in the original versions of these passages, if they included actual lists of names. I use the terms “informative” and “performative” here in a somewhat informal manner, derived from terminology employed in the development of speech acts theory within discourse analysis, especially Austin’s initial description of performative sentences through these examples:

“I do (take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife)”—as uttered in the course of the marriage ceremony; “I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth”—as uttered when smashing the bottle against the stem; “I give and bequeath my watch to my brother”—as occurring in a will; “I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow”… To name the ship is to say...

29 Grossman, Reading for History, 161.
(in the appropriate circumstances) the words “I name, etc.”. When I say, before the registrar or altar, etc., “I do”, I am not reporting on a marriage: I am indulging in it.30

CD 4:4–5 functions in a similar manner: “Here are the detail(s) of their names in their generations and the time(s) of their standing.” By listing, or even promising to list, detailed data about the contemporary/eschatological elect, the author or editor of CD 4:4–5 would have been acting in his role of elect recipient and disseminator of privileged information, revealing details of eternal divine records about blessed individuals—the unfolding of human events in their determined times, including the present. This activity, I maintain, lies at the heart of Qumran pesher. The oft-cited passages in Pesher Habakkuk that present the pesherist’s own perception of his activity take on fresh meaning when viewed in the context of the preceding discussion. 1QpHab2:5–10 and 7:1–5 both describe and constitute pesher as revelatory exegesis:

It refers to ([על דבר הPragma]... in the Last Days... everything that is to come up on the latter generation that will be spoken by the Priest in whose [heart] God has put [the ability] to explain ([למשר) all the words of his servants the prophets, through [whom] God has foretold everything that is to come upon his people and [his] community. (1QpHab 2:5–10)

When it says, “so that with ease someone can read it,” this refers to the Teacher of Righteousness to whom God made known all the mysterious revelations of his servants the prophets. (1QpHab 7:3–5)

The essence of the production of pesher compositions is the transmission of revealed truths that are believed to have been encoded in scripture for the purpose of these future revelations about future events and people. The act of transmission is as much an actualization and fulfillment of eschatologi-

cal expectations as the unfolding social and political history that is tied to the texts. The act of peshering, for which the verb לפשור, “to explain,” is used in 1QpHab 2:8, is rooted in the worldview seen above in CD, 4Q180, and 4Q252. This worldview incorporates a hermeneutic of reading scripture as a tool for discovering hidden truths of contemporary and eschatological value. Where pesher compositions disclose the contemporary significance of prophetic future-oriented scriptural texts associated with the end-time, ימי אחרית, this other group of compositions aim to reveal contemporary applications of Pentateuchal texts about the distant past, ראשונים or קדמוניות. The shared use of the term פשר in these compositions is the subject of the second half of this study.

2. פשר in Non-Pesher Compositions from Qumran

The term pesher is most commonly associated with the “continuous” pesharim and, to a lesser extent, the “thematic” pesharim from Qumran. As one would expect, the majority of the attestations of the word in the Qumran corpus are found in these works.31 Here, I would like to call attention to the handful of occurrences of the Hebrew root פשר in compositions other than those generally labeled as pesharim: CD 4:14; 1Q30; 4Q159 5, 1; 4Q180 1; 4Q252 IV 5; 4Q464 3 ii 7, and probably 1Q22.32 The etymology of the word pesher and its relation to the root פреш have been discussed at length in earlier studies, especially with regard to dream interpretation.33 My focus here is upon the occurrences of these roots in


33 See Berrin, “Qumran Pesharim,” 123–26 and the literature cited there, esp. in n. 51; see also the comparison between Qumran pesher and rabbinic petira, ibid., 113; and Paul Mandel, “Midrashic Exegesis and its Precedents,” DSD 8 (2001): 149–68. I do not address the attestations of Aramaic פשר in the Qumran corpus, all of which are found in the Book of Giants. In 4Q503, the word simply denotes dream interpretation (4Q530 ii+6–12, 14; ii+6–12, 23; ii7; ii10). Stuckenbruck has noted the wordplay with the root פרשא in 7 ii 7, where Enoch is called פשר מהרשא. This designation is found as well in 4Q203 8 4, a few lines
the relevant texts. Some of these attestations are very similar to the use of the term in *pesher* compositions, while others exhibit a distinctive set of shared features that can shed light on the meaning of the term and upon early Jewish conceptions of a pre-determined schema of history.

2.1 *פֶּשֶר* in CD, 4Q252, 4Q180, and 4Q464

In CD 4:14 the term *pesher* is used formulaically to introduce an identifying interpretation, as it is in the *pesharim*:

But during all those years, Belial will run unbridled amidst Israel, as God spoke through the hand of the prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz, saying: “Fear and a pit and a snare are upon you, O inhabitant(s) of the land” (Isa 24:17). This refers to (*פֶּשֶר*) the three nets of Belial, of which Levi, the son of Jacob, said that he (Belial) entrapped Israel with them. (CD 14:12–16)

Devorah Dimant has designated this as an “isolated *pesher*,” a label she applied further to instances of *pesher*-like interpretation that do not actually employ the word *pesher* itself. Dimant stated that “the texts com-

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34 I view this as one of many necessary approaches for determining the “meanings” of *pesher*. See the methodological considerations, especially the questions, raised by George Brooke in his, “Pesher and Midrash in Qumran Literature: Issues for Lexicography,” *RevQ* 24/93 (2009): 79–95.

35 Devorah Dimant, “Pesharim,” in *ABD* 5:247. She noted that the extant cases identified as “isolated *pesharim*” are found primarily in CD, with an additional example in 1QS, and that, “Significantly, all the isolated pesharim occur in paraenetic sections, where the pesharim serve as prooftexts both for events in the history of the community and for its ideological tenets” (ibid.). Lim has suggested that the term *pesharesque* be used to describe instances of this sort of interpretation without the term *pesher* (Timothy H. Lim, “The Qumran Scrolls, Multilingualism, and Biblical Interpretation,” in *Religion in the Dead Sea Scrolls* [ed. John...
mented upon in this way are mostly prophetic, but a few are taken from ancient songs found in the Torah. In the example just cited, the text that is interpreted is from Isaiah, but reference is also made to a teaching of a Pentateuchal figure, the patriarch Levi son of Jacob. This is potentially significant, because the other occurrences of the term *pesher* outside of *pesher* compositions are all associated with Torah, and figures in the book of Genesis are especially prominent in these sources.

In one of these passages, the term “*pesher*” is again used in the familiar manner of an interpretive formula, introducing a comment upon Gen 49:3–4:

“Reuben you are my first-born and the firstfruits of my strength, excelling in dignity and excelling in power. Unstable as water, you shall no longer excel. You went up onto your father’s bed. Then you defiled it”. ‘On his bed he went up!’ Its interpretation (עזרון) is that he reproved him for when he slept with Bilhah his concubine. And he [s]aid, “You are my firstborn Reuben” he was the firstfruits of [... (4Q252 IV 3–7)

There are a number of anomalies to this usage, however. The chief anomaly is that the interpretive comment does not offer a contemporizing or


36 Dimant, ibid.

37 The use of biblical prophetic texts as bases for contemporizing exegesis is among the defining characteristics of Qumran pesher. Although some texts cited in the pesharim are from Torah, the extant continuous pesharim are all commentaries on sections of books of the Prophets or Psalms, and these are predominant in the thematic pesharim as well. See Shani Tzoref, “Qumran Pesharim and the Pentateuch: Explicit Citation, Overt Typologies, and Implicit Interpretive Traditions,” DSD 16 (2009): 190–220.

eschatological identification of the cited text, but rather provides an explanatory identification related to an event that occurred in the past vis-à-vis the quoted speaker. In Gen 49:1, the blessings of Jacob are characterized as pertaining to הימים אחרית, and in the subsequent column of 4Q252, the blessing to Judah is in fact given a contemporizing eschatological interpretation (4Q252 V 1–7).39 But the “pesher” of Jacob’s pronouncement to Reuben does not focus upon the present or future; it provides the frame of reference for the quoted verses in a past event—Reuben’s act of sleeping with Jacob’s concubine Bilhah, as recorded in Gen 35:22—and an explanation for the fact that Jacob’s parting “blessing” to Reuben consisted of rebuke.40

I suggest that the key to understanding the use of the term pesher in 4Q252 is the recognition that the primary authorial aim in this composition is the same as that in 4Q180 and in Jubilees—particularly with respect to the material attributed to the Heavenly Tablets: the presentation of a conventional list of elect and non-elect figures in Genesis, and promises made concerning them and their offspring, in accordance with pre-ordained periods of time.


39 Some scholars have described the use of the term pesher here as conforming to the manner in which it is usually employed. Cf. George J. Brooke, “4Q252: 4QCommentary on Genesis A,” DJD 22:187; Lim, “The Qumran Scrolls,” 64. Lim maintained that the two passages in columns IV and V of 4Q252 are similar in nature, other than the presence or absence of the word pesher. I agree that the similarities are important—both passages apply a text associated with הימים אחרית to a specific historical event pertaining to prediction, reward, and punishment—but the difference with respect to eschatological content of the interpretation is also significant.

40 It is unlikely that mere identification of the referent of Jacob’s words is the primary purpose of the comment; we would expect the intended readers to be aware of this (pace Eisenman and Wise, “14. A Genesis Florilegium.” See Bernstein, “4Q252: From Re-Written Bible,” 17–18. More likely, the point is the rebuke. The comment is not an explanation of the verse, but a demonstration of how the application indicates actualization and fulfillment. The specification of the real-life case to which the poetic words apply is not intended to provide data to an uninformed reader, but to prove alignment between real life and the poetic prophetic utterances pertaining to reward and punishment.
To this group, we may add 4Q464 (Exposition on the Patriarchs). In their introductory notes to 4Q464, Charlesworth and Elledge comment upon the “stylistic resemblances” among 4Q464, 4Q180, and 4Q252, “all of which combine narrative and exegetical styles.” The compositions also exhibit similarity of content and themes, and the use of the word *pesher*; they all present selected passages from Genesis pertaining to the righteous and wicked. As observed by Esther Eshel and Michael Stone, both 4Q464 and 4Q180 use the word *pesher* in the context of specifications of historical time periods, with reference to stories about the patriarchs from the book of Genesis. These works contain the only extant examples in the Dead Sea Scrolls in which the word *pesher* appears in the phrase “*pesher* ’al.” Although the similar collocations על בפסחא and על דבר בפסחא are both attested in *pesher* compositions, the specific use of the absolute form of the word without pronominal suffix and followed by preposition על is so far unique to the works cited here. It reflects the distinctive use of the term *pesher* with respect to “subjects” or “events,” rather than to introduce an

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44 Dimant, “The Pesher on the Periods,” 92, with respect to 4Q180.

45 Thus, Moshe J. Bernstein, regarding the occurrence in 4Q159, in idem, “4Q159 Fragment 5 and the ‘Desert Theology’ of the Qumran Sect” in *Emanuel; Studies in Hebrew Bible, Septuagint and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honor of Emanuel Tov* [ed. Shalom M. Paul et al.; VTSup 94; Leiden: Brill, 2003], 43–56 at 53 n. 29). Our discussion of the meaning and function of פשח at Qumran may offer some insight into the puzzling occurrences of the term in 4Q159 (4QOrdinances). This is not a *pesher* composition. The extant fragments primarily form a “medley of laws,” and the work has been compared to 4Q265 (thus, Joseph M. Baumgarten, “4Q265,” DJD 35:58–59). In frag. 5, containing the word מסח, the subject matter is Pentateuchal narrative. The central text has been identified as Exod 33:7, in which Moses pitched the Tent of Meeting outside the camp. The first occurrence
interpretation of a particular verse. In 4Q180, על פשר הוא is used with respect to “time periods” generally, both in the title of the work, and in the introduction to the section on the Watchers. In 4Q464, a fragmentary composition that exhibits particular concern with chronology in the narratives of Genesis, the idiom is used in the context of Gen 15:13, the Covenant of

of the term פשר, in line 1, seems to be formulaic, but the preceding words, אל ומותו, do not correspond to any known biblical text, and the same is true for the words פשר הדバー in line 5. As noted, Bernstein suggests that perhaps what is “being ‘peshered’” here is a “historical event” rather than a text. For Bernstein, the historical event is “Moses’ separation of himself from the Israelite camp, after the biblical Israelites had sinned with the golden calf.” He suggests that this may have served typologically as a model for the Qumran community’s “own departure to the desert to isolate themselves from the sinful remainder of contemporary Israel.” Bernstein (ibid., 45 n.6; 46 n.11) rejects Strugnell’s proposal that the words אל ומותו in line 1 are the remnants of a variant citation of Lev 16:1, recording the deaths of Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu. However, even if one were to accept Strugnell’s proposal, the reference to Lev 16:1 would best be explained along the lines suggested by Bernstein, taking fragment 5 as a typological “pesher of an event.” As suggested by Schultz, the probable reference to Nadab and Abihu in 1QM 17:2 could provide a parallel to 4Q159, in presenting Lev 16:1 as a typology for the future time of the “testing in the crucible.” See Brian Schultz, Conquering the World: The War Scroll (1QM) Reconsidered (STDJ 76; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 118–19. Perhaps, in 4Q159, what it means for a Pentateuchal event to serve as pesher is that it is presented as the fulfillment of a predestined fate associated with elect and non-elect figures, and thereby serves as evidence for the divine master plan, similar to how certain events in Genesis are treated in the works we examine below.

46 4Q180 1 1 and 1 7. The following translations are from Dimant, “Pesher on the Periods,” 78–79. Line 1 פשר על הקצות אשרUSH על אל פשר is due to the fact that the phrase does not introduce an interpretation of a particular biblical verse, but rather provides a thematic title for the composition as a whole, and for a new section in line 7. Thus, Lim: ‘The technical term ‘pesher’ is used twice to introduce the concept of ages which God had made and Azazel and the angels who consorted with the daughters of man (cf. Gen. 6:4)” (Lim, Pesharim, 17); and it is “plausibly reconstructed” in a comment on Gen 18:20–21 (ibid.), i.e., at 2–4 ii 7. Lim follows Józef T. Milik, “Milki-šedeq et Milki-reša dans les anciens écrits juifs et chrétiens,” JJS 23 (1972): 109–24 at 119.
the Pieces, which is a prophecy pertaining to a designated time period.\textsuperscript{47} 4Q180 and 4Q464 also exhibit a similar use of vacats to set off blocks of material, a phenomenon that is found in 4Q252 as well.\textsuperscript{48} Eshel and Stone comment upon the blank lines that set off sections in this manuscript: “These divisions may suggest that the manuscript contains a series of promises of prophecies of an eschatological character based upon the biblical narratives about the patriarchs”.\textsuperscript{49}

I thus suggest that the use of the term \textit{писать} in 4Q252 may be illuminated by the use of the expression \textit{על} \textit{писать} in 4Q180, where it designates historical periodization in the book of Genesis, and in 4Q464. The introduction to the comment on Reuben's blessing in 4Q252 IV 3–7 seems to blend the sense of \textit{pesher} as a technical term serving the specific exegetical and formulaic function of applying a biblical verse to an historical event, as in the \textit{pesharim}, together with a distinct but related usage to designate exposition of divinely ordained periods in the remote past, as in 4Q180 and probably 4Q464. In 4Q180, the subject matter that is \textit{peshered} is identified as קץ.\textsuperscript{50}

2.2 פשר

It is instructive to compare the \textit{pesher} on קץ of 4Q180 to CD 13:7–8. Baumgarten and Schwartz translate:

> And this is the rule for the Examiner of the camp (למחנה להבקר): Let him instruct the Many about the works of God, and allow them to discern the wonder of his mighty deeds and relate to them the happenings of eternity together with their interpretations.

\textsuperscript{47} 4Q464 3 ii 7 \textit{писать על} (DJD 19:222 and Pl. XXVII) (the 'ayin is marked doubtful). The immediate context in 4Q464 is lacking, but it is likely that this is not a citation of a specific verse. Gen 15:13 is plausibly restored in lines 3 and 4, following a citation formula, but there is additional text in lines 5 and 6. Line 7 does not appear to be a direct interpretation of the previous citation (contra Lim, \textit{Pesharim}, 17).

\textsuperscript{48} Eshel and Stone, “4QExposition,” DJD 19:217.

\textsuperscript{49} Eshel and Stone, “4QExposition,” DJD 19:215.

\textsuperscript{50} See the discussion of the relationship between קץ and \textit{писать} above section 1.1.
The Hebrew of the last phrase is בפרתיה והיו עולם לפני פורתיה (where בפרתיה is a metathesis for בתרפיה).

51 Elisha Qimron prefers the reading found in 4Q267 iv 5 בתרפיה (Qimron, The Dead Sea Scrolls: The Hebrew Writings [Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 2010], 1:48; so, too, Baumgarten and Schwartz, ibid.). Since עולם הנהיה is feminine, and the waw of הנהיה may in fact be a yod, the reading in CD may be equally acceptable, and perhaps preferable. In 4Q298, the referent of the masc. pl. poss. suff. in פורתיהם would be “days,” following the restoration מי as suggested by Stephen Pfann (DJD 20:25–27).

52 Similarly, 4Q298 3–4 ii 8–9 is restored מפרתיה אשר פורר (Pfann, “4Q298 4QCrypt A Words of the Maskil to All Sons of Dawn,” DJD 20:1–30 and Plates I–II, at 21, 25, 27. The reconstruction is based on CD 13:8, because of the similar content, style, and context of the leader’s revelation of esoteric knowledge to the community.

53 These occurrences are the only attestations of this noun in the extant corpus. The lone attestation of the verb פורר in 4Q223–224 (4QpapJub), simply follows biblical usage with respect to Joseph’s interpretation of Pharoah’s dream in. In their 1995 edition of CD, Joseph M. Baumgarten and Daniel R. Schwartz wrote, “פורר is now found in the 4Q fragments as a variant for מש, ‘interpretation’” (Baumgarten and Schwartz, PTSDSSP 2:55). Presumably, this is a reference to פורתיהם in 4Q266 and 4Q267.

55 Józef T. Milik, DJD 1:132–33, pl. XXX.
biblical texts. A formulaic usage introducing an interpretation does not seem likely. Baumgarten stated that פתר in 4QD “is equivalent to פשה, ‘interpretation’.” I agree that פשה in these texts is equivalent to פשה, but prefer a broader understanding of the meanings of פשה, reflecting not only the interpretive aspects of the term, but also its concern with progressive revelation about ordained time periods.

Our investigation of the terms פתריהם and (ם פתרים in non-pesher compositions reinforces appreciation of the interconnectedness of exegesis and revelation in Qumran pesher. Our observations concerning the use of these terms to describe revelation about pre-ordained historical periods serve to enhance our understanding not only of 4Q180, 4Q464, and 4Q252, but also of the more general function of the term pesher at Qumran as indicating the true meaning of biblical prophecy with regard to a time period beyond its original utterance. The evidence from the use of פשה and the collocation על פשה על at Qumran corroborate the view that pesher interpretations of biblical verses in pesher compositions do not only aim to offer the true identifying interpretation of a given verse, but more


57 Similarly, Pfann and Kister, translate “whose interpretation” in 4Q298 (Pfann and Kister, DJD 20:27). Another instance in whichしたもの has been understood as “interpret” is Milik’s restoration and explanation of 1Q22 (Józef T. Milik, “1Q22 Dires de Moise,” DJD 1:91–97; Milik restores ורש, in I 3, which he explains as an imperative—a command to Moses to interpret the Torah; he distinguishes between Moses’ obligation to offer explanation of the Torah to the elite—heads of families, levites, and priests, as compared to “simple notification” to the people as a whole (ibid., 93; see Timothy H. Lim, Pesharim, 17). The restoration is uncertain, and the context is too fragmentary to allow for responsible evaluation of the text or of Milik’s hypothesis. On this text, see also John Strugnell, “4Q376 Apocryphon of Moses,” DJD 19:121–36 at 130; Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, “A Cave 4 Fragment of Divre Mosheh (4QDM) and the Text of 1Q22 1:7–10 and Jubilees 1:9, 14,” DSD 12 (2005): 303–12; Daniel K. Falk, “Moses, Texts of,” in EDSS 1:577–81.
precisely to designate the specific preordained time for its fulfillment. I propose that when the term “pesher” is used in Qumran pesharim to indicate the identification of contemporary/eschatological referents of biblical prophetic texts, this is a technical application of a term that was already in use to describe the fulfillment of divine plans in ordained time periods, with a probable special association with Pentateuchal narrative.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to suggest that discourse analysis of the sort tentatively attempted above concerning the performative aspects of naming in CD and 4Q177, may be profitably combined with genre study to offer further insight into Qumran pesher and into the sectarian corpus as a whole.

In her discussion of “theories of genre,” Carol Newsom wrote:

One of the features that has often been noted about the sectarian literature from Qumran is the number of new genres developed by the community. These include, most notably, serakim, pesharim, hodayot, mishmarot, and a variety of distinctive liturgical texts such as the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, covenant ceremony texts, marriage rituals, rituals of expulsion, and so forth.58

Among the questions Newsom asks about these genres as a group, is “How do they work together to construct the integrated sectarian world and also to differentiate it into a series of discrete experiences?”59 One feature that is common to many of the “new” genres named by Newsom is that many of them may be considered “performative”; they do not only report or instruct but they enact; they constitute activities and construct realities. Serakhim do not only describe rules—they prescribe rules. Hodayot describe liturgy, but more importantly, they constitute liturgy. And so too, with the other liturgical and ceremonial texts in Newsom’s list. Even if one follows Elliot Wolfson’s judgment that the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice are not mystical as such, the performative aspect of the communion in the text is

59 Ibid.
evident. In the case of liturgy and ritual, it might actually be more appropriate to speak of “performance texts.” This is illustrated effectively in Menahem Kister’s presentation of 1QS 1:16–2:19, the text of the Yahad’s annual covenant renewal ceremony. Kister uses three different fonts in order to distinguish between (1) the descriptions of the ceremony (which read as stage directions); (2) the statements of the participants (essentially, the script); and (3) the introductory paraphrase of the scripted statements.

In this manner, we may gain an appreciation of how the innovative author(s) of Qumran pesharim built upon existing terminology and beliefs such as pre-ordained periods of history, heavenly records of divine elect and non-elect, and the necessity for revelation and instruction in these mysteries, to create the genre of Qumran peshar.

To understand the genre of peshter, in addition to considering such factors as the meaning of the lexeme מַשְּׁרָה and the technique or mode of exegesis employed in peshar, it can be useful to attend to the distinction between texts that report about revelation and texts that reveal. In the instructional contexts of 4Q298 and the Damascus Document, the terms פֶּשֶר and פֶּשֶּׁרִים are employed to describe the transmission of knowledge of divine mysteries by community leaders. In 4Q298, it is clarified that these פֶּשֶר pertain to “former times” (קדמוניות) and that the point of the instruction is oriented toward understanding of the future: “so that you may understand the עולמות קץ . . . and know [. . .” In the extant portions of 4Q180 and 4Q464, the word peshar occurs in the context of presentation of data about elect and non-elect individuals in those former periods. These texts do more than describe the need for instruction—they are not only about revelations pertaining to former times, but they themselves instruct. They reveal data about former times, within the rubric of the unfolding of the grand divine design, and they employ formulaic terminology in doing so: מַשְּׁרָה על. This seems to be the sort of material that


would have been in the curriculum of the Maskil and the Mevaqqer as described in 4Q298, in teaching about the fulfillment of times. The continuous *pesharim* also actually reveal data about the unfolding of God’s predetermined plan, and employ formulaic terminology in doing so, including especially the expressions “‘pesh or ‘pesh ‘pesh.” However, the revelations in the continuous *pesharim* do not pertain to the former days, but to the latter or last days הימים אחרית. Hence, their base-texts, or hypotexts, are prophetic scriptures rather than the Pentateuchal material found in 4Q180 and 4Q464.62 The leader with whom they are associated is the Teacher of Righteousness.63 In the *Damascus Document* and 4Q252, the term *pesher* is used in a formulaic manner similar to that employed throughout the continuous *pesharim*, for cases of the implementation of *pesher* as a technique, in which interpretations of particular biblical verses connect the former times to the End of Days. Finally, the “thematic *pesharim*” seem to take a somewhat broader view, showing interest in both describing the eternal process of revelation and instruction and in interpreting biblical verses with respect to the fulfillment of divine plans for the elect in the End of Days.

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63 1QpHab 2:7–10; 7:1–5.