

# The Dead Sea Scrolls

Intertestamental Period Seminar

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**Next Week: Last Session for 2016**

“Request Night”

# Wisdom, Education, and the Scribal Tradition at Qumran

# Wisdom Literature at Qumran

- Conventional “Wisdom” is about how to live a good life
- “How to be successful”
- Part of a larger, regional tradition of instructional literature found in every ancient Near Eastern civilization.



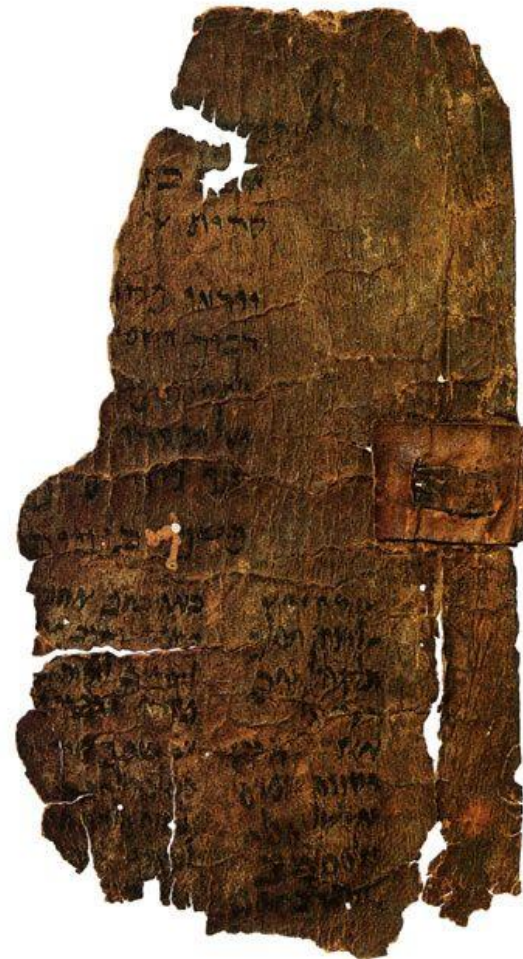
# Review: Wisdom Themes

- Very worldly
- Almost never makes mention of the Covenant or covenantal obligations
- Little mention of God in history
- Unconcerned with end-time scenarios
- The world is uncertain; no one knows what will happen.



# What Was Wisdom Literature Doing at Qumran?

- Not many regular non-biblical wisdom texts
- Widely variant subgenres represented
- Some texts (but not scrolls) trace back as far as about 300 BCE
- Most wisdom scrolls probably came from private collections, donated to the Essenes.



# Wisdom and Scribes

- Scribal training was inextricably bound up with the study of Wisdom literature
- Wisdom literature was an essential part of training for interpretation



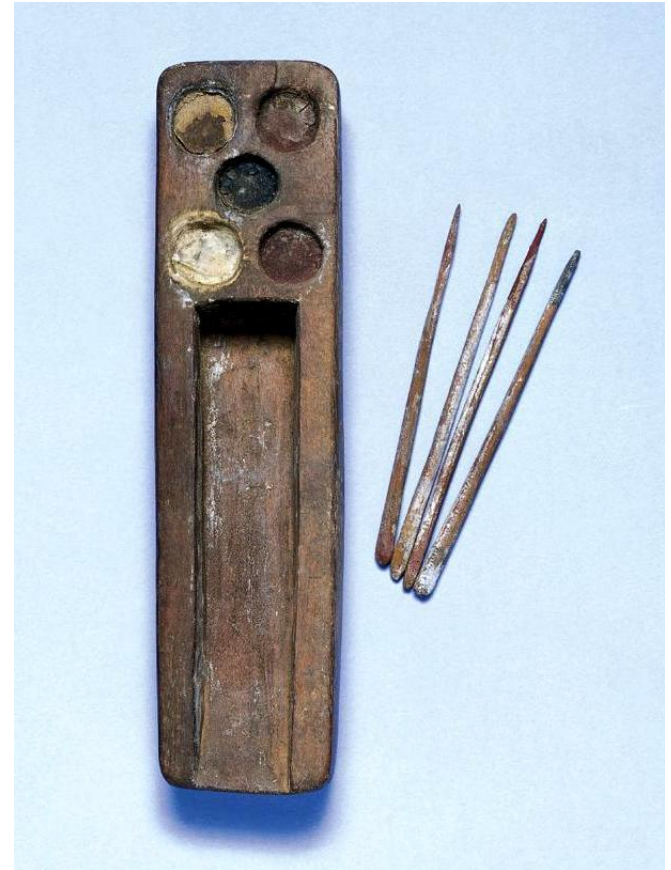
# Comparing Scribal Traditions

- Scribal traditions differ considerably across cultures and times
- Scribal traditions in the ancient Near East and ancient Israel should not be confused with later medieval monastic scribal practice
- Most scribes were secular



# Ancient Scribes: Egypt

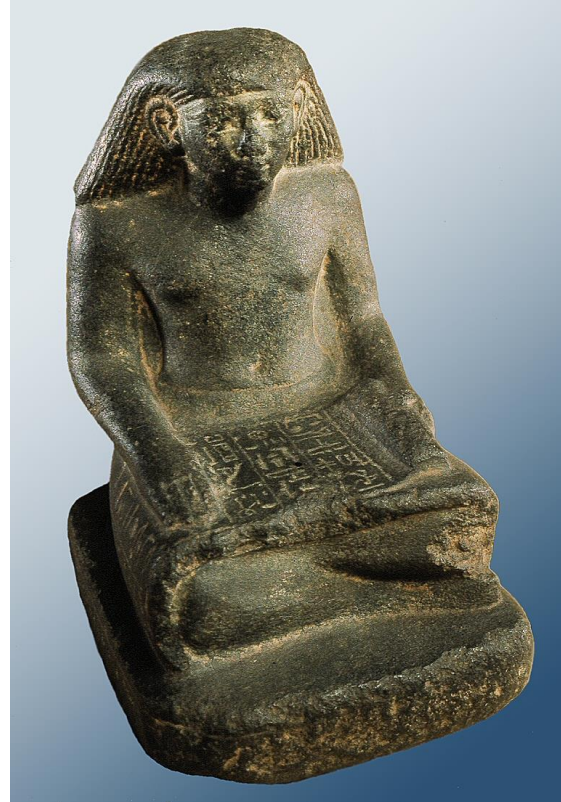
See, there's no profession  
without a boss  
except for the scribe; He  
is the boss.  
Hence if you know writing  
it will do better for you...  
Look, I have set you on  
god's path;  
A scribe's *Renenet* (good  
luck) is on his shoulder



# Ancient Scribes: Egypt

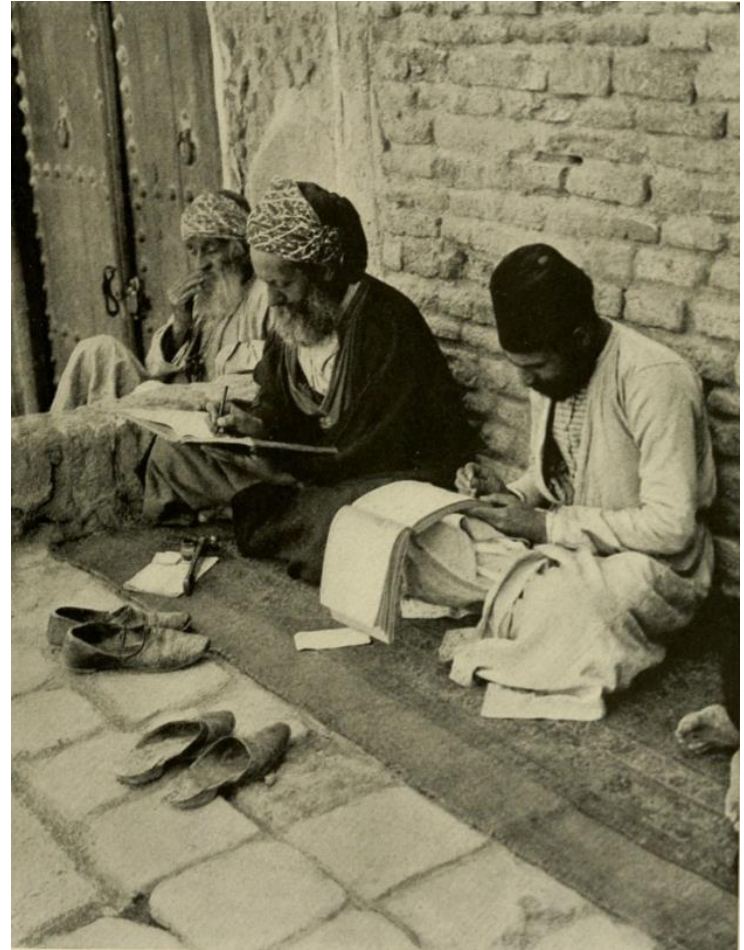
on the day of his birth;  
When he reaches the gate  
the people bow down  
before him;  
Look. No scribe is short of  
food and of riches of the  
palace...

--Kheti son of Duauf



# Israelite Scribes

- Clearly part of the bureaucracy during the Monarchy
- Israelite administration mimicked that of Egypt
- Various references to written material and record-keeping



# Intertestamental Scribes

The wisdom of the scribe depends on the opportunity of leisure;  
only the one who has little business can become wise.

How can one become wise who handles the plough,  
and who glories in the shaft of a goad,  
who drives oxen and is occupied with their work,  
and whose talk is about bulls?

--Ben Sirach 38:24-25

# Second Temple Educational Reforms

- Rabbinic texts describe changes in the law, setting up schools to education children regardless of economic status.
- Reform was aimed at the entire society.

“That teachers of school-children be placed in every city-state and in every town and that [children] be brought there at the age of six or seven.”

-- *Baba Batra 21a*

# Ben Sira on the Life of a Scribe

How different the one who devotes himself  
to the study of the law of the Most High!  
He seeks out the wisdom of all the ancients,  
and is concerned with prophecies;  
he preserves the sayings of the famous  
and penetrates the subtleties of parables;  
he seeks out the hidden meanings of proverbs  
and is at home with the obscurities of parables.

# Ben Sira, continued...

He serves among the great and appears before rulers; he travels in foreign lands and learns what is good and evil in the human lot.

He sets his heart on rising early to seek the Lord who made him, and to petition the Most High; he opens his mouth in prayer and asks pardon for his sins.

--Wisdom of Ben Sira 38:34-39:5

# Education at Qumran

- Two types of groups:
  - Community
  - Camps
- Communities, like Qumran, were inhabited by celibate men
- “Camps” consisted of families





# Qumran Education

- “Camp” families provided the bulk of the students
- Course of study generally described in the *Community Rule* and the *Covenant of Damascus*.



From his y[outh] [they shall edu]cate him in the Book of Hagy, and according to his age, instruct him in the precepts of the covenant, and he wi[ll receive ins]truction in its regulations; during ten years he will be counted among the small children. At the age of twenty y[ears, he will transfer to] those enrolled to enter the lot amongst his family and join the holy community.

*--Rule of the Congregation  
(1QSa 1:6-9)*

He shall not [approach] a woman to know her by lying with her before he is fully twenty years old, when he shall know [good] and evil. And thereafter, he shall be accepted ...to assist at the hearing of judgements.

At the age of twenty-five years he may take his place among the foundations (i.e. the officials) of the holy congregation ...

At the age of thirty years he may approach to participate in lawsuits and judgements...

-- The Messianic Rule

(1QSa – a variant of the Community Rule)

# What is the “Book of Hagy”?

- No book by that title has been found
- “Hagy” seems to derive from a word meaning “to meditate.”
- Early speculation was that it was another name for the Torah
- Another name for Temple Scroll (Yadin).



# “Vision of the Meditation on a Book of Memorial”

- Mentioned in *Musar Le-Mevin (4QInstruction)*
- Book was given as a special inheritance to people of superior spirituality
- Reflects a wisdom tradition heavily informed by dualism and determinism



# Qumran Wisdom

- Compare with Wisdom of Solomon: God is far more active in making a “just” world
- Punishment from God happens in this life
- The world is deterministic



# Determinism

You are needy; do not desire something beyond your share/inheritance, and be not you confused by it, lest you displace your boundary... And by the *raz* that is to be study the origins thereof (i.e. of the mystery) and then you shall know what is allotted to it , and in righteous shall you walk.

-- (4Q417 2 iii 8-10)

# “Beatitudes” (4Q525)

[Blessed is] ... with a pure heart

and does not slander with his tongue.

Blessed are those who hold to her (Wisdom's)  
precepts

and do not hold to the ways of iniquity.

Blessed are those who rejoice in her,

and do not burst forth in ways of folly.

Blessed are those who seek her with pure hands,

and do not pursue her with a treacherous heart.

Blessed is the man who has attained Wisdom,

and walks in the Law of the Most High.