

Qumran Commentaries in Graeco-Roman Context

©Markus Bockmuehl
University of Cambridge

Ours is an era saturated in commentaries. By one rough measure of counting, the world's libraries now hold over 100,000 different volumes catalogued under that heading.¹ Is it perhaps the mark of an ageing civilization that we devote quite so much time to texts about texts, not to mention texts about meta-texts and even second-order re-readings? Scriptural and other ancient literature, at any rate, has long been strip-mined to a point where it goes without saying that, as a famous critic wryly noted three centuries ago, 'learned commentators view | in Homer more than Homer knew.'²

But where did it all begin? For biblical scholars, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls half a century ago provided an exciting and convenient new starting point in the form of several running expositions of prophetic books in eschatological terms, which soon came to be known as *pesharim* (after their use of the distinctive technical term *pishro*, 'its interpretation is').

Drowning as we are in modern biblical commentary, it may be easy to forget that this is a genre whose origins date back to the Graeco-Roman period: there was a time when commentaries were not. For contemporary scholars of ancient Judaism and Christian origins, the beginning of this history finds a particular focus in the late second century B.C.E., when a genre of biblical commentary first emerged, fully formed and seemingly without precedent, from the pen of monastic scribes in the Judean wilderness. These Qumran commentaries known as *Pesharim* have long since attracted a thriving cottage industry, a virtual subdiscipline complete with its

¹ This figure is based on a search of WorldCat, a database of world libraries which in 2003 held 52 million records. On a more modest measure purely within a Christian theological context, Princeton Theological Seminary's catalogue offers just under 6,000 entries associated with the word 'commentary'.

² Jonathan Swift, *On Poetry*, l. 103.

own conferences, monographs, student textbooks and the requisite petty feuds and wrangles.³

My aim in the present paper is not to add to this discussion, but simply to ask if it is really the case that as a phenomenon of ancient exegesis these commentaries were, like Melkizedek, *sui generis* and without genealogy. What similarities and connections, if any, exist between the *Pesharim* and the contemporary commentaries of the Graeco-Roman period? Although I write as an outside observer of specialists in both classes of literature, it nevertheless seems to me that this question of the relationship between them has not been sufficiently explored and harbours interesting insights for the phenomenology of ancient commentary. Ironically, the major reference works and textbooks on the Scrolls show little interest in this material: literary analogies and points of comparison have been sought almost exclusively in later Jewish literature, including the Targums, rabbinic midrash, and occasionally the New Testament – though no genuine parallels have been agreed.⁴ The wider context of ancient commentary has not featured in this discussion. Even Philo of Alexandria, whom in these pages we will identify as perhaps the most important bridge between Graeco-Roman and Jewish commentary writing, has received remarkably little attention in relation to the *Pesharim*.

The findings of my short study are preliminary and relatively modest, but my project will have succeeded if it encourages more expert interpreters to take a more active interest in its subject matter. I begin by establishing some definitions, and move from there to a brief sketch of ancient Graeco-Roman commentary literature. A survey of the *peshar* commentaries then leads to concluding comments about potential contact between Qumran and Hellenistic commentary techniques and more specifically about formal analogies between them.

³ For an overview of current *peshar* studies see e.g. Lim 2002, Brooke 2000 and Horgan 2002; Charlesworth 2002b is more generally concerned with Qumran history. Pioneering earlier works include Elliger 1953, Brownlee 1979, Horgan 1979 as well as Nitzan 1986; note also the massive recent work of Doudna 2001 on 4QpNah.

⁴ See the circumspect assessment of *peshar* as a distinct genre in Lim 2002:44-53.

What Makes a Commentary?

Given the enormous range of ancient interpretative material on Scripture and other canonical texts, we need a definition to keep the subject from becoming unmanageable. By 'commentary' I will here denote *works consisting primarily of sequential, expository annotation of identified texts that are themselves distinguished from the comments and reproduced intact, whether partially or continuously.*

This definition is not without its problems, but it has the advantage of distinguishing commentary from a number of related interpretative phenomena. These would include paraphrase, scholion,⁵ 'inner-Biblical exegesis'⁶, 'rewritten Bible',⁷ but also intertextual allusions or citations in works not of a primarily expository nature. The boundaries in this area are undoubtedly somewhat fuzzy, especially between commentary and 're-written Bible',⁸ or in cases where the actual *lemma* of cited text departs from known text-forms and may already reflect a degree of interpretative modification.⁹

Nevertheless, the difference between 'reworking' a normative text and expounding it is sufficiently clear in terms of both form and presuppositions to allow us to set commentary apart from other forms of intertextual reflection. As George J. Brooke has also demonstrated in a study of the diverse genres in use at Qumran, the beginning of explicit commentary is a relatively late stage of such reflection, and one of the clearest markers of the end of the process of canonization.¹⁰

⁵ Newlands 1978: 16, 19 suggests that continuity distinguishes the commentary from the scholion.

⁶ A phrase popularized by Fishbane 1996; Fishbane 1985.

⁷ This term, although still controversial, has been widely employed for at least three decades to describe usually 'parabiblical' works that often seem to adapt or rewrite earlier Scriptural narratives. See already Harrington 1972.

⁸ See e.g. Bernstein 1994a and Brooke 1996a on 4Q252, although both operate with a somewhat looser definition of 'commentary'. On 4Q252 see also below.

⁹ This contested phenomenon is widely discussed; Lim 2002:54-63 provides a useful recent introduction.

¹⁰ Brooke 2002a: 'It is noticeable that in the Qumran literary collection there is a mixture of explicit and implicit commentary on authoritative scriptures. I am inclined to think that the explicit commentary such as is found in the pesharim is generally to be considered later than those compositions which contain implicit exegesis in their reworkings of authoritative texts. ... The discovery of explicit commentary in the Qumran library shows that the process with regard to a certain selection of literary traditions is nearly complete.'

The gradual move from 'rewriting' via implicit to explicit commentary documents the emergence of a conviction that the text is now a given. It is authoritative not merely in content, but has achieved the status of a 'classic' which is at least in principle substantially inviolate. This much is true for all relationships between ancient commentaries and texts, including pagan examples in Greek and Latin. Where ancient Jewish (and indeed Christian) biblical commentary differs, as we shall see, is in the additional assumption that the text is no longer merely a literary 'classic' of formative philosophical and religious interest, but definitive precisely inasmuch as it is divinely revealed. In this sense the literary move towards textual fixity has its corollary in the *theological* shift from the text as a sympathetic (but malleable) *reflection* of normative views to a point at which its form and content are themselves the uniquely normative disclosure of divine truth.

Greek and Roman Commentaries

In antiquity, the term *commentarius* (Greek ὑπόμνημα) denoted a bewildering variety of written records intended as *aide-memoire* of either a private or official nature. These records ranged from notebooks or archival records of accounts; speeches or didactic material; jurisprudential, priestly or governmental decrees or rescripts; all the way to literary works including scholarly texts and biographical or autobiographical material (i.e. 'memoirs' rather than 'memoranda').¹¹ Under this more literary heading there gradually developed a thriving and important genre of 'commentary' proper, i.e. at first a collection of explanations of a text.

The Greek Tradition

According to Philo of Byblos (c. 70-160 C.E.), Sanchuniathon of Berytus (c. 700 B.C.E.?) attributed the invention of *hypomnēmata* to none other than the Egyptian

¹¹ Surveys of the terminology are widely available; see e.g. Thédénat 1887; Bömer 1953; Lippold 1975; Pelling 1996; Kaster 1999.

man-god Thoth (i.e. Hermes).¹² And allegorical exegesis of Homer can be shown to have its oral origins in the performative tradition well before the fifth century B.C.E.¹³ The earliest identifiable 'commentaries', however, do not in fact appear until very much later. Some recent scholarship would wish to identify the so-called Derveni Papyrus (5th cent.) as a commentary on an Orphic religious text.¹⁴ However, formal commentaries in the narrower sense defined above do not really emerge until the third century in Greek and the late second or early first century in Latin.¹⁵

The influence of the Greek commentary tradition remained for a long time largely confined to the East. It is, however, no less interesting for that, and intrinsically more likely to have influenced Jewish expositors in the Holy Land and the Diaspora -- not least in Alexandria, as we shall see. As is the case for the Latin *commentarius*, the Greek *hypomnéma* at first denoted a record of notes or an *aide-memoire*. In practice this covered wide range of items including official memoranda, archives and registers, but also more private records like notes for a speech or for study or teaching – or indeed in some cases for an outline or draft of a work of history or philosophy. In later usage one then finds that certain works of history, geography, medicine, philosophy and rhetoric may be identified as *hypomnémata*.¹⁶ Of particular interest of early Christianity is the fact that the term also came to be used of autobiographical and biographical writings – as it is in Justin's famous designation of the gospels (e.g. *Dial.* 106.2-3).

¹² Philo of Byblos quoted in Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.* 1.9.24. On Sanchuniathon see e.g. Eissfeldt 1952; Röllig 1975; Healey 1996 and the literature cited there.

¹³ See e.g. Obbink 2003:178; Ford 1999, also cited in Laird 2003:175; and previously Pfeiffer 1968:212.

¹⁴ So e.g. Lamedica 1992; but cf. already Pfeiffer 1968:139n.7, cited approvingly by Obbink 2003:180 who consistently refers to the author as 'the Derveni commentator' (*passim*). The papyrus (also known as *P.Thessaloniki*) was discovered in that Greek city in 1962 and features a late fifth-century interpretation of an Orphic poem of theogony. For text and recent discussion see e.g. Janko 2002; Laks and Most 1997; Betegh 2004.

¹⁵ These dates, although obviously debatable, refer respectively to the New Comedy poet Euphron's *hypomnémata* on Aristophanes' *Plutus* (so Pfeiffer 1968:160-61, quoting *Lexicon Messanenense*) and to the interpretation of *Carmen Saliare* (a barely intelligible ancient hymn) by Lucius Aelius, the first great Roman scholar. Geffcken 1932 offers an earlier study of the origin of Greek scholarly commentaries, written before many of the twentieth century's papyrus discoveries.

¹⁶ See Montanari 1998:813-14 with references *inter alia* to works of Polybius, Ptolemy, Galen, Diogenes Laertius and Ps.-Longinus. In this respect, Pfeiffer's critique of Wilamowitz-Moellendorff's definition is perhaps a little overstated as (Pfeiffer 1968:29 on Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1907:121ff.)

Commentaries in the narrower sense of sequential annotations of literary texts began to emerge in the Hellenistic period. Together with the definitive edition of texts (*ekdosis*), we shall see that the commentary (*hypomnéma*) became one of the characteristics especially of Alexandrian scholarship from about the second century B.C.E., although it arose out of a thriving earlier tradition of erudite poetry and textual interpretation.¹⁷ Alexandria's philological eminence was due in large part to its two famous publicly funded institutions of learning: the great Library and the adjacent scholarly community known as the Museum, founded c. 280 BCE by Ptolemy I Soter.¹⁸

Not unlike their modern successors, ancient philologists carefully distinguished in this connection between treatises or monographs (*syngrammata*) and commentaries (*hypomnémata*) on a given text.¹⁹ Most of this material did not survive intact, although it exercised an extensive influence on the subsequent Byzantine scholia and philological tradition. However, thanks to the 20th century's extensive papyrus discoveries, especially at Oxyrhynchus, we are now in the fortunate position of having at our disposal, for the first time since late antiquity, a substantial library of Alexandrian commentaries ranging in date from the third century B.C.E. to the sixth century C.E (although the fullest documentation exists only for the first to the third centuries CE).²⁰

These commentaries were usually based on literary works, especially Homer and the tragedians, but increasingly also including Aristotle and Plato (famously developed by Proclus in the fifth century and by Damascius in the sixth).²¹ But the

¹⁷ See p. 17 below. Prof. Horbury suggests to me that the learned nature of Alexandrian poetry may itself have encouraged a commentary tradition, and that recondite biblical passages that explicitly required interpretation (e.g. Zechariah, Daniel) would have fostered an analogous Jewish interest.

¹⁸ See e.g. Reynolds and Wilson 1991:6-17.

¹⁹ For this distinction see e.g. Pfeiffer 1968:212-14; Montanari 1998:814.

²⁰ A pioneering treatment of this material was the survey of 112 such papyri by del Fabbro 1979; see her catalogue, pp. 128-30; and cf. pp.92 n.74, 131-32 for the dominant time frame. More recent literature is discussed in Dorandi 1999, Luppe 2002 and Trojahn 2002. See also n. 14 above for discussion of the Derveni papyrus.

²¹ See the extensive editions of Leendert Westerink on Proclus, Damascius and Olympiodorus (e.g. Westerink 1959, 1970; Westerink, Olympiodorus, and Damaskios 1976); for Proclus see also Festugière

twentieth century's papyrus extensive discoveries, especially at Oxyrhynchus, brought to light a commentary literature on writers like Herodotus, Demosthenes or Thucydides,²² as well as on the great Attic comedians including Aristophanes and Eupolis.²³ A developing scientific subgenre eventually included extensive commentaries on Euclid and Ptolemy (e.g. by Pappus of Alexandria, fl. 320 CE), but also on Hippocrates and other 'applied' medical texts, of which Galen (c. 129-199) is a towering, if somewhat rambling, representative.²⁴ In late antiquity, another important subgenre was that of papyrus commentaries on legal texts, developed especially in fifth-century Beirut and Gaza.²⁵

Such commentaries consistently distinguish between lemma and exposition, and like their Latin counterparts they may include a wide variety of comment covering matters of philological, exegetical, rhetorical, antiquarian, historical and biographical, scientific, mythological and philosophical interest – although the majority of commentaries on papyrus served relatively popular pedagogical, rather than strictly scientific, purposes.²⁶ They offer sapiential, moral and aesthetic advice, sometimes by way of allegory.

In their heyday in the 1st-3rd centuries, papyrus commentaries were produced on good, though not luxurious, mid-sized scrolls, with the text written in wide columns using a clear and functional semi-cursive script and a system of

1966-68, 1970. Sedley 1997 discusses Roman commentary on Plato; D'Ancona Costa 2002 deals with commentary on Aristotle in the late antique and medieval period.

²² E.g. del Fabbro 1979:123.

²³ For the commentary and scholia (marginal notes) tradition on Attic comedy see esp. Trojahn 2002 and previously Zuntz 1975 (first published in 1939). Trojahn 2002:211 and *passim* notes that while scholia are necessarily subject to limitations of space, the nature of the comments could in principle be the same as that in *Hypomnēmata*.

²⁴ See von Staden 2002, who comments (e.g. p.134-36) on Galen's frequent failure to observe his own criterion of utility for the practitioner of medicine. On Galen as a commentator see further Manetti and Roselli 1994; also Westerink 1985-1995 on Stephanus (6th cent.) and Strohmaier 2002 on the medieval reception history of Galen's commentary. Andorlini 2000 notes more generally the phenomenon of medical papyri and their annotation by owners who were medical practitioners. See more generally von Staden 1989 on the pioneering influence of Herophilus (c.330-260) on much of ancient medical primary and secondary literature.

²⁵ See Wilson 1967, 1968 on Gaza and McNamee 1998 (cf. McNamee 1995) on Beirut.

²⁶ So e.g. Hadot 2002:184-85, 199 and *passim* on the primary function of philosophical commentaries.

abbreviations and diacritical symbols. The title, with the name of the author and of the commentator, was placed at the end.²⁷

The Latin Tradition

Most of the early Latin commentaries were on classic plays or poems like Aristophanes, the *Carmen Saliare* and above all Virgil, although some commentators cover unknown or seemingly more obscure works like those of the mid-first-century poet C. Helvius Cinna, a friend of Catullus.²⁸ On the whole, what is striking about the earliest Roman commentaries is that they tended to appear soon after the works being commented on.

Much of this extensive literary output remains at best in fragments. On the other hand, the earliest extant complete commentary in Latin is the influential treatment of Virgil by the fourth-century grammarian Servius, apparently a fellow student of Jerome under Donatus. This commentary, whose author held the prestigious lectureship associated with the title of *grammaticus urbis Romae*, survives in several hundred medieval MSS.²⁹ Other near contemporaries include Pomponius Porphyrio on Horace (early 3rd cent.) and Aelius Donatus on Terence (4th cent.); but we know of many other commentaries in circulation at this time.³⁰ By the fourth century, there was a widespread and highly developed commentary tradition on Virgil, whose importance had long been assured by his ubiquitous presence in schools. The compendious variorum commentary of Aelius Donatus (4th cent.) permitted commentators to draw on a wide range of learning and opinion from four centuries of Virgil scholarship. No other ancient author was so extensively commented on.

²⁷ Cf. del Fabbro 1979:92.

²⁸ Kaster 1999:681; Cinna's sophisticated miniature epic *Zmyrna* was regarded as a masterpiece of the emerging Roman poetry (cf. Courtney 1996).

²⁹ Cf. e.g. Zetzel 1981:81-83; Reynolds and Wilson 1991:32-33.

³⁰ Jerome, *Apologia Contra Rufinum* 1.16 (CCL 79.15.26, quoted in Marshall 2000:1058), knows numerous commentaries not only on Virgil, but on Sallustius, Cicero, Terence, Plautus, Lucretius, Flaccus, Persius and Lucan.

To modern readers, at least the format of Servius' commentary on Virgil seems in some respects remarkably familiar, not to say contemporary.³¹ His critical stance is to highlight questions of particular importance, which are discussed with reference to a range of opinion – and sometimes readers are encouraged to make their own judgement between a variety of options. Servius' introduction deals with standard issues of *Einleitung*: the life of the poet, the title, character (*qualitas*) of the poem, its 'intention' and the number and order of the books. This is followed by line-by-line or word-by-word explications of the text, aiming to communicate Virgil's intention. The majority of comments are linguistic, concerned with semantic meaning and assessing Virgil's use of language by the criteria of the grammatical rules of his time – departures are explained as 'archaisms' or 'figures'. Finally, Servius turns to a range of matters of textual³² and rhetorical criticism, intertextual links with Homer and other Greek and Latin poets, philosophical and religious issues in the text, and notes of antiquarian or historical interest.

For our purposes, a number of features especially of the ancient commentary on literary classics seem particularly interesting. We shall return to these after considering the phenomenon of commentary at Qumran.

Qumran Commentaries

All this is amply evident in the Dead Sea Scrolls, whose discovery brought to light the earliest explicit Jewish commentaries on Scripture, dating by common consent from the period of c. 100 BCE – 70 CE.

Identification

Before turning to commentaries proper, it will be useful to mention in passing several other texts that are sometimes identified as 'commentaries' in the scholarly

³¹ For this discussion I am indebted to Guthmüller 2000; Marshall 2000:1059-60; Kaster 1999:681-82.

³² For the Latin commentators' textual criticism see esp. Zetzel 1981:81-147 on Servius and pp. 148-70 on Donatus.

literature. Aside from occasional references to the Damascus Document as a kind of thematic (but in any case not sequential) commentary, there are several fragments formally identified by the Editors as a 'Commentary on Genesis' (4Q252, 4Q253, 4Q254, 4Q254a).³³ Of these, 4Q252 in particular has attracted a lot of scholarly attention, partly because its genre is so intriguingly difficult to classify.³⁴ It is true that in its treatment of the Jacob's blessings in Genesis this text not only employs Qumran's distinctive technical term *pishro* ('its interpretation', 4Q252 4.5) to expound Gen 49.4, but also proceeds to offer an explicitly messianic interpretation of Gen 49.10 as referring to the 'messiah of righteousness, the branch of David'. And other influential texts confirm that the Dead Sea sect clearly viewed the Pentateuch as of no less 'prophetic' importance than other parts of Scripture (e.g. 4QMMT C 20-24 = 4Q398 11-13.3-7). Despite this, however, 4Q252 does not obviously belong to the 'commentary' genre as defined above: it consists for the most part of a non-continuous and in part extensively *rewritten* text of Genesis 7.10-8.13; 9.24-27; 22.10-12; 49.3-20. Apart from the annotations in columns 4 and (especially) 5, there is no attempt to distinguish textual lemma from interpretation; and it remains difficult to distinguish what is simply an integral part of the *aggiornamento* of 'rewritten' discourse from what is intended as comment upon an inviolate given text. Although a number of recent scholars have spoken here of 'excerpted' or 'selective commentary', it is also generally admitted that the document is a composite compilation of pre-existing interpretations.³⁵ In this and other respects its genre is also clearly unstable, appearing to fluctuate between 'rewritten Bible' and commentary and thus not a clear instance of the latter.³⁶ In that sense, for all its undoubted intertextual reflection, 4Q252 in significant respects resembles the

³³ See the official publication in Brooke 1996b, 1996c, 1996e, 1996f; for a while it was even misnamed as a Genesis 'peshet' (contrast e.g. García Martínez 1996:213 with García Martínez and Tigchelaar 1997-98:1.505).

³⁴ Cf. Bernstein 1994a; Brooke 2000; Trafton 2002 and the literature cited there.

³⁵ Brooke 1996a:400 speaks of 'a compilation of pericopae containing various kinds of commentary', although even this designation begs the question of whether we are still dealing with continuous 'commentary' in the sense here in view.

³⁶ See e.g. Brooke 1996a:395-400; Bernstein 1994a:24 and *passim*; Trafton 2002:204 and n.4

posture of documents like the Temple Scroll, *Jubilees*, Pseudo-Ezekiel and a number of Qumran 'Apocrypha' more than that of the explicit commentary in the consecutive *pesharim*, which will attract our attention here.³⁷

Another group of texts to be omitted here are the so-called 'thematic' *pesharim* texts like 11QMelchizedek or 4QFlorilegium, which collate scriptural material around a particular topical focus.³⁸ Although here too the technical term *pishro* is used to identify eschatological interpretations,³⁹ once again we are clearly not dealing with the consecutive exposition of an intact, objective normative text. A number of other fragmentary texts seem in some respects to resemble the prophetic *pesharim*, but probably also do not properly belong to this genre.⁴⁰

Characteristics

For present purposes, therefore, I shall adopt a standard enumeration of fifteen continuous *pesharim*, all of them in Hebrew: five on Isaiah, seven on the minor prophets (Hosea (2), Micah (1), Nahum (1), Habakkuk (1), Zephaniah (2)) and three on the Psalms (Pss 37, 68, 129).⁴¹ Although all of these texts are fragmentary and

³⁷ Among the same group of fragments appears a text known as Commentary on Malachi A-B (4Q253a), which uses *pishro* 'al once and might in theory be part of a more extensive work. Another noteworthy exception is 4Q159 frg. 5.1, which applies the term *pesharim* to the explication of Lev. 16.1. The highly damaged fragments of 4QpUnid (4Q172) permit few conclusions. In all these cases, we have few indications of continuous commentary. On these and other exceptions see also Lim 2002:53; Brooke 2000:779; also e.g. Charlesworth 1994-2002:6B.203-365 on 'other commentaries' and 'related documents'.

³⁸ Cf. Brooke 2000:779; Lim 2002:14, citing terminology first employed by Carmignac 1969-71. See also his fuller list of ten 'thematic *pesharim* and other related texts', pp. 16-18. Brewer 1992:194 regards 4QFlor as a commentary on 2 Sam 7; but that identification, although not implausible at first, breaks down at the end of line 13.

³⁹ E.g. 11QMelch (11Q13) 2.12, 17; cf. 4QFlor (4Q174) 1.1.14, 19.

⁴⁰ See the discussion in Lim 2002:15.

⁴¹ 4QpIsa^a (4Q161), 4QpIsa^b (4Q162), 4QpIsa^c (4Q163), 4QpIsa^d (4Q164), 4QpIsa^e (4Q165); 4QpHos^a (4Q166), 4QpHos^b (4Q167); 1QpMic (1Q14); 4QpNah (4Q169); 1QpHab; 1QpZeph (1Q15), 4QpZeph (4Q170); 1QpPs (1Q16), 4QPs^a (4Q171), 4QPs^b (4Q173, but NB excluding frg. 5; see Horgan 2002). Reference may also be made to two other fragmentary texts including an apparent Isaiah *pesharim* in 3QpIsa (3Q4), on Isa 1.1, and a possible Micah *pesharim* in 4QpMic (?) (4Q168), on Mic 4.9-10; both are included as *pesharim* in Horgan 2002. The document sometimes thought to be a possible Malachi *pesharim*, 5QpMal(?) (5Q10), on Mal 1.14, is now generally called *Commentary on Malachi A* (e.g. Charlesworth 2002a) and paired with *Commentary on Malachi B* (4Q253a; see Brooke 2002b; cf. previously Brooke 1996d). Both of these remain sufficiently fragmentary to preclude confident conclusions about any sort of consecutive commentary; the same is true *a fortiori* of the 'unidentified *pesharim*' fragments known as 4QpUnid (4Q172) and of the 'pesharim-like fragment' 4Q183 (see Charlesworth 1994-2002:6B.195-201, 358-61).

none provide anything approaching a complete running commentary, they do share several distinctive characteristics that bear on our inquiry. We will do well to bear in mind George Brooke's admonition that at Qumran the term *peshet* serves to denote more than just commentary, and that there is much biblical interpretation that is not *peshet*.⁴² Nevertheless, it is the case that all the commentaries here in view are interested in *peshet*.

1. All assume that the biblical text is, at least formally, a fixed point of reference. Much as the textual *lemmata* reflect a degree of continuing textual fluidity and may even be adjusted to suit the commentator's hermeneutical stance, there is now no doubt that the text stands in some sense over against the interpreter, as the object of interpretation and understanding rather than simply as available means to a writer's literary ends.
2. None of the *pesharim* in question reproduce the biblical text in its entirety; this is a point whose significance in the context of ancient commentary writing will be further explored below. What matters here is that the Qumran commentators all nevertheless quote the relevant portion of text (the '*lemma*') before expounding it.
3. Some quote only brief phrases, while others (like several of the Isaiah commentaries) may cite whole verses or paragraphs of text. Similarly, some expository comments are extensive while others are little more than parenthetical glosses. In the case of 4Q163, at least, it has been suggested that the commentary quoted from chapters 8-30 of Isaiah,⁴³ while the *pesharim* on Nahum and Habakkuk repeatedly cite (or re-iterate) individual terms. In each case, however, the pattern of citation followed by an exposition remains consistent; as does the deliberate separation of the former from the latter by a stereotypical tag (e.g. *pishro* [*al* or *'asher*], *peshet ha-dabar* [*al*], *hu'* [*ah*] etc.)⁴⁴ or in some cases even by a

⁴² Cf. Brooke 2000:783.

⁴³ See e.g. Horgan 1979:86-93; cf. Lim 2002:29.

⁴⁴ Note e.g. the index of citation formulae in Trafton 2002; also Bernstein 1994b, esp. pp. 67-68 on the significance of the different formulae within the continuous *pesharim*.

clear space or blank line (so some of the *pesharim* on Isaiah as well as on Hosea, Nahum and Habakkuk: 4Q161, 4Q166, 4Q167, 4Q169; 1QpHab).

4. Although not straightforwardly continuous, the order of the texts expounded nevertheless remains in keeping with the canonical sequence.⁴⁵
5. The Dead Sea commentators only occasionally make reference to the biblical author or circumstances pertaining at the time of the biblical text's composition. Generally speaking, linguistic, philological or diachronic historical issues remain outside the Qumran commentary's purview.
6. The commentators take for granted that the text contains definitive divine pronouncements or prophecies that concern the commentator's present, near future or relatively recent past, often with surprising specificity. These contemporary points of reference are in turn understood as part of the eschatological (and sometimes messianic) end time conflicts.
7. In keeping with this confident interpretative stance, insights about the text's specific bearing on the contemporary context are themselves implicitly (and sometimes explicitly⁴⁶) derived from divine revelation, although that revelation was granted exclusively to the sect's founding master interpreter, the Teacher of Righteousness, and through him to his followers.⁴⁷
8. An interesting feature of Qumran as of other ancient commentaries is that the commentator's typological reading is not always univocal. An instructive example of such hermeneutical multivalency is 4QpNah 3-4.1.1-11. Within the space of a few lines the *Pesher* on Nahum first identifies the 'lion' (*aryeh*) of Nah 2.12 (ET 2.11) with 'Demetrius, king of Yavan' (probably Demetrius III Eucareus, 95-88 BCE) and then proceeds to find a *different* 'lion' (*aryeh*) in Nah 2.13 (ET 2.12)

⁴⁵ 4QpIsa^c (4Q164), without diverging from the canonical order of Isaiah, quotes several other biblical prophets (Jer; Zech; Hos) in the course of its commentary. The only apparent exception is 4QpIsa^e (4Q165), whose *editio princeps* (*DJD* 5 (1968) 15-17 and pl. vi) arranges the fragments so as to produce a non-sequential commentary; but in view of the consistency of the other *pesharim* on Isaiah, it would seem plausible to re-arrange the material in canonical order, as has been variously suggested (cf. Lim 2002:29, citing J. Strugnell and M.P. Horgan).

⁴⁶ Most famously in 1QpHab 6.15-7.6; cf. 1QpHab 2.8-10; 4QpIsa^d (4Q164).

⁴⁷ Cf. my fuller remarks in Bockmuehl 1990:79-81.

– the contemporary Jewish ruler who 'hanged living men from a tree', i.e. Alexander Jannaeus (who famously crucified eight hundred Pharisaic dissidents).⁴⁸

The Scrolls and Ancient Commentary

What, then, are we to make of the similarities between the ancient Graeco-Roman commentary tradition and the genre of Scriptural commentary that appears to have emerged more or less fully-formed on the shores of the Dead Sea around 100 BCE?

The easiest and safest answer is to treat them as wholly unrelated: no love is lost in the Scrolls for the Kittim and all their works, and aside from passing merchants only an encyclopaedic geographer like Pliny could show even passing interest in an eccentric religious conventicle in one of the ancient world's least hospitable environments.

Great ideas, however, have a habit of crossing even the most impermeable cultural boundaries, and of taking root in contexts that appear in other ways radically opposed. A wholly unrelated Jewish example of this might be the post-exilic development of beliefs in a dualistic cosmology or in resurrection, all of which have been thought to derive from Persian roots. More closely *à propos* the topic of literary production, it is clear that even the monks of Qumran had benefited from a certain amount of 'globalization': for all their idiosyncrasies, they came to adopt not only the new 'square' Aramaic script and trends in Hebrew *plene* orthography, but their physical production of scrolls shows extensive dependence on contemporary scribal technology – from the manufacture of ink to the craftsmanship and preparation of leather and papyrus.

⁴⁸ Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 13.372-83; *War* 1.90-98. For the polysemy of the terms *aryeh* and *kefirim* in this passage see also Lim 2002:32-33.

Alexandrian Literary Criticism at Qumran?

It is obviously tempting, therefore, to speculate about links between Qumran and the emerging commentary tradition of the Hellenistic world – perhaps above all as evidenced in Alexandria. After all, despite their relative isolation the two worlds were never wholly sealed off from each other. Greek philosophical and literary texts featured at the Dead Sea site of Wadi Murabbaʿat, as did a fragment of Virgil at Masada.⁴⁹ And of course both Qumran and Murabbaʿat turned up a wide variety of biblical texts in Greek – the same texts that were the object of Jewish study and indeed commentary in Alexandria. Jerusalem Jews appear to have played a part in the composition of the Septuagint, and even Josephus' exposition of the Pentateuch in the *Antiquities* famously acknowledges that a proper understanding requires one to recognize that some things Moses 'shrewdly veils in enigmas, others he sets forth in solemn allegory'.⁵⁰

If one were to give vent to such genetic speculation for a moment, it could be well worth pondering the connection that many scholars still suspect between the Essenes and the *Therapeutae* near Lake Mareotis in Lower Egypt, both of which were known to Philo of Alexandria as keen 'allegorical' interpreters of Scripture in the context of a monastic common life. The Essenes, he writes, take a keen moral interest in their interpretation of the divinely inspired ancestral laws (τὸ ἠθικὸν εὖ μάλα διαπονοῦσιν ἀλείπταις χρώμενοι τοῖς πατρίοις νόμοις). They study them at all times and especially on the Sabbath, when in their synagogues they will listen as one person reads aloud from the books and another, more experienced interpreter 'explains what is not self-evident' (ὅσα μὴ γνώριμα παρελθὼν ἀναδιδάσκει).

⁴⁹ *Aeneid* 4.9. The influence of Virgil in Palestinian Judaism is documented to good effect in Horbury 1999:157-62 and *passim*; cf. also Alexander 1998 on the perceived relationship between Homer and Moses. For Wadi Murabbaʿat see e.g. Nos. 108-111.

⁵⁰ Josephus *Ant.* 1.4 §24, τὰ μὲν αἰνιπτομένου τοῦ νομοθέτου δεξιῶς, τὰ δ' ἀλληγοροῦντος μετὰ σεμνότητος (while also stressing that whatever needed to be clear is in fact clear!). Cf. LXX Esther 10.31

Philo's other monastic group, the *Therapeutae*, were thought by some church fathers to be a group of ascetic Christians,⁵¹ but are now usually regarded as representing the Egyptian branch of the Essene movement. They base their initiation into the sect (NB ἀΐρεσις, *Vit. Cont.* 29) on a similar commitment to the 'laws, prophetic oracles, psalms' and other books; and their spiritual exercises between morning and evening prayers consist substantially of allegorical reflection on their Holy Scriptures (τοῖς ἱεροῖς γραμμασι). Imitating the exegetical method exemplified in the writings of their founders, they take words of the surface text to imply a deeper symbolic meaning (σύμβολα τὰ τῆς ῥητῆς ἐρμηνείας νομίζουσιν ἀποκεκρυμμένης φύσεως ἐν ὑπονοίαις δηλουμένης, *Vit. Cont.* 28-29). The formal exposition of Scripture in these inherited 'allegorical' terms⁵² is also of particular importance at their festive banquets, when the senior president (πρόεδρος: *Vit. Cont.* 75) takes up a particular topic in the Scripture and begins to instruct the community in extended and reiterative fashion. It is characteristic of their interpretation that whole written revelation (νομοθεσία) resembles a living being that has the literal commandments (τὰς ῥητὰς διατάξεις) as its body and the invisible sense (ἀόρατον νοῦν) as its soul; and the task is to view the invisible through the visible (τὰ ἀφανῆ διὰ τῶν φανερῶν θεωρεῖν, *Vit. Cont.* 75-78). Once again we find the intriguing combination of respect for the literal text while seeking a hidden meaning, even if Philo understandably conceives of that meaning in mystical and transcendent rather than specifically eschatological terms.

While there is here no reference to written commentaries, Philo's Essene and Therapeut expositors arguably take up *lemmata* requiring explication in much the same fashion as Qumran's pesherist does. This is, to be sure, a different enterprise from that of translation or a meturgeman's paraphrase. Nevertheless, it is significant that Philo identifies an explicitly homiletical *Sitz im Leben* for these activities, as indeed for his similar description of the Sabbath service in synagogues (*proseuchai*)

⁵¹ E.g. Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 2.16-17.

⁵² αἱ δὲ ἐξηγήσεις τῶν ἱερῶν γραμμάτων γίνονται δι' ὑπονοιῶν ἐν ἀλληγορίαις, *Vit. Cont.* 78.

more generally, where a priest or elder reads the holy laws and 'expounds them point by point', καθ' ἑκάστον ἐξηγεῖται.⁵³ Philo's fascination with the homiletical hermeneutics of Essenes and Therapeutae is arguably of a piece with his own approach to Scriptural exposition, which has been thought to have similarly homiletical origins.⁵⁴

Philo was undeniably familiar with Alexandrian literary criticism and commentators on Homer and the classics, whose exegesis resembles Philo's allegoresis in several respects. Neo-Platonic commentators favoured a mystical exegesis that found in Homer knowledge about the quest of the soul, and disclosures about the secrets either of the natural world (e.g. its spherical shape) or of the mystical realms above.⁵⁵

We saw earlier (cf. p. 6) that a commentary tradition on the classics had thrived in Alexandria for several centuries. To take just one genre, early expositors of ancient comedy, for example, included Lycophron (b. c. 320 BCE) and Callimachus (c305-c240) as well as Eratosthenes (c275-195) who wrote at least twelve books on early comedy; a commentator in the more technical vein was Aristophanes of Byzantium (c257-180), director of the Royal Library (though he did not compose *Hypomnēmata* as such).⁵⁶

Alexandrian *Hypomnēmata* in the proper sense originated around this same time with writers like Callistratos (2nd cent BCE), who produced them on Homer and at least six comedies of Aristophanes. Aristarchus of Samothrace (c216-144), another head of the Library and a champion philologist (ὁ γραμματικώτατος⁵⁷), produced both critical editions and commentaries on Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Aristophanes, Herodotus and others.⁵⁸

⁵³ For the significance of this passage cf. also Leonhardt 2001:89-90; also pp. 93-95 on Philo's link between liturgy and homiletical exposition.

⁵⁴ So e.g. Newlands 1978:20-23.

⁵⁵ For Homeric allegoresis cf. e.g. Lévêque 1959:10; Buffière 1956:2-3; Grant 1957; Wehrli 1928.

⁵⁶ See Trojahn 2002: 123-27.

⁵⁷ Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 15.12 (ed. Kaibel).

⁵⁸ Cf. Lazenby, Browning, and Wilson 1996.

Alexandrian Jewish allegoresis of the Pentateuch arguably began with second-century BCE texts like the *Letter of Aristeas* (144-69) and Aristobulus.⁵⁹ Philo, writing a century and a half later, was already very much in tune with the literary critical and mystagogical concerns of contemporary Alexandrian commentary on Homer, whom he cites over 50 times.⁶⁰ Philo applied many of these Alexandrian exegetical conventions to his own consecutive expositions of the Pentateuch (e.g. in *Leg.*, *Spec.*, *QG*, *QE*). At the same time, he appears to show familiarity with Jewish exegetical techniques – though whether these similarities derive from Palestine or are common Hellenistic stock remains a matter of some debate.⁶¹

In view of this literary critical setting, it seems significant that Philo thought he recognized a kindred and commendable hermeneutical practice in the biblical interpretation of both the Essenes and the *Therapeutae*. Even the talk of exegetical 'mysteries' (μυστήρια; *razim*) and of 'plain' (ὀρήτη, φανερός; *niglot*) and 'hidden' (ὑπόνοια, ἄδηλος; *nistarot*) meanings of the text shows intriguing parallels.⁶² And it remains inevitably suggestive that apart from Philo and the *Pesharim* we know of no other consecutive biblical commentaries during the Second Temple period.⁶³ All this makes it tantalizing to wonder about the possibility of intellectual correlations between the commentary traditions of Alexandria and Qumran – as also, looking forward, with those of the great Alexandrian Christian commentators that followed (including Origen, Aristarchus, Didymus and Theon).⁶⁴ The influence of Alexandrian grammarians on Jewish interpretation in the Holy Land has repeatedly been

⁵⁹ See esp. *apud* Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.* 8.9.38-10.17; 13.12.9-16. Translation in *OTP* 2:837-42; text in Denis and De Jonge 1964-70:3.217-28.

⁶⁰ Buffière 1956:38-39n.27 somewhat overstates the case in suggesting an exclusively allegorical interest: for him, Philo's approach 'correspond à la tendance des Néoplatoniciens qui, pour l'exégète d'Homère, ne s'intéressent plus au sens physique, mais cherchent dans les aventures d'Ulysse l'histoire mystique de l'âme en marche vers la vraie patrie.' Philo in fact remained somewhat nervous of solely allegorical readings, as he famously shows in *Migr.* 89-93. Cf. further my discussion in Bockmuehl 1990:78-81.

⁶¹ See the useful survey of the evidence and recent scholarship in Brewer 1992: 199-204.

⁶² For references see e.g. Bockmuehl 1990:77.

⁶³ A point rightly stressed by Brewer 1992:194.

⁶⁴ Cf. e.g. Horbury 1990:733-36 and n.16. The abiding influence of Alexandrian tradition for both commentary on papyri and medieval scholia is demonstrated in the case of comedy by Zuntz 1975, followed by Trojahn 2002:215.

suggested,⁶⁵ as has Philo's reception of Palestinian aggadic traditions and modes of interpretation.⁶⁶ And the possibility that Alexandrian Jews might export ideas about biblical interpretation to the Dead Sea seems immediately less far-fetched when we recall the extensive discoveries at Wadi Murabba'at and other sites of biblical texts in Greek.

Qumran and Ancient Commentary: Four Points of Comparison

At the end of the day, the superficial analysis just provided permits of no grand deductions about literary connections or even confident conclusions about intellectual points of contact. Nevertheless, further research in this area remains a definite *desideratum* simply because Qumran scriptural commentaries emerged in a context where Jewish scholars were aware of a thriving Hellenistic commentary tradition that bore certain analogies to their own hermeneutical concerns and techniques. Certain texts came to be regarded as inviolate literary classics replete with hidden meaning: every seemingly stony phrase might to the attentive exegete yield an unexpected flood of divinely charged significance that was often directly applicable to the life of the reader.

By way of a preliminary conclusion, I wish here to single out four salient formal characteristics that would seem to invite further comparative research along these lines.

1. Leaving aside the separate genre of *florilegia*, commentaries in the developed sense tended to be concerned with *sequential texts*, even if the vagaries and accidents of time have ensured that in many cases we are dealing with fragments rather than entire books. The different Qumran and classical commentaries vary considerably in the style and length of comment provided; but the impression given is that the text to be covered was at least in principle treated in its entirety, from beginning to end, and that all of its particularities were of interest.

⁶⁵ Notably by David Daube (e.g. Daube 1949, 1977); cf. also Cazeaux 1983, 1984.

⁶⁶ See e.g. Brewer 1992:199-200, 203-204; cf. the classic treatment of Wolfson 1947.

Having said that, an obvious difference in the developed classical commentary is its more explicitly philological and scientific aspect, which might range from breathings and accents to vocabulary, orthography, and the precise meaning of terms.

Grammatical and mythological features were equally of interest, and commentators might take a view of aesthetic strengths or weaknesses. Similarly, Graeco-Roman commentaries often paid greater attention to the personality of the author and the historical circumstances in which he worked.

2. Whether fully sequential or not, commentaries cited the text by means of consecutive *lemmata*. The most complete classical commentaries in fact provided a continuous sequence of *lemmata*, since this obviated the need for a separate edition of the text. In her study of commentaries on papyrus, del Fabbro noted that the use of non-continuous *lemmata* presupposed the availability to the readers of a separate edition of the complete text⁶⁷ -- a point of evident relevance for the Qumran commentators, who could take the presence of a written or at least memorized Scriptural text for granted. Partly because abbreviated or incomplete *lemmata* tended to preclude the independent circulation of the commentary in the absence of a separate text, later commentators all opted to include the entire text.⁶⁸

3. The commentator's interpretation was deliberately separated from the text and yet presented as a valid and implicitly authoritative exposition of its significance. This separation is usually achieved by means of stereotypical phrases: where at Qumran one finds terms like *pishro*, *peshet ha-dabar* or the like, in classical commentaries one might encounter ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ ῥῶδῃ λέγει ὅτι to mark a paraphrase, and ὅτι or τὸ σημεῖον ὅτι in case of explanatory comments.⁶⁹ As at Qumran, *lemma* citations may sometimes be less than exact. While one cannot rule out the possibility that a variant may represent an adjustment to suit a commentator's preferred reading, especially for classical texts the original may not

⁶⁷ So del Fabbro 1979:81.

⁶⁸ del Fabbro 1979:91. Note the similar but imperfect analogy in the relationship in the Talmud between Mishnah and Gemara, and between the Talmud itself and the marginal Tosafot.

⁶⁹ Cf. del Fabbro 1979:97.

always have been continuously at the commentator's disposal.⁷⁰ Both Qumran and Graeco-Roman commentators periodically resorted to quotations from elsewhere in the same or another author's work (especially in the case of Homer); this often served either to confirm the interpretative position taken by the commentator or else to underline the authority of the work under investigation.

4. Finally, Alexandrian exposition on Homer in particular affirmed the need to read texts allegorically, to discover under the rough literal surface of the text the polished gems of an interpretation for the life of the readers, both for their knowledge of God and for their present life in the world. In Alexandrian commentary these gems were of course philosophical rather than eschatological, but Philo for one found among the biblical interpretation of Essenes and Therapeutae a kindred love for the vision of a deeper sense of a sacred text. At any rate the sudden appearance at Qumran of a surprisingly mature technique of prophetic commentary leaves one to wonder about the wider Graeco-Roman influences that may have helped in its rapid development.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Cf. del Fabbro 1979:102-04.

⁷¹ I am grateful for comments received on this paper from my colleague Prof. W. Horbury.

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Qumran in Context book. Read reviews from world's largest community for readers. Qumran is not the site of an Essene community hitherto thought to be res... Goodreads helps you keep track of books you want to read. Start by marking Qumran in Context: Reassessing the Archeological Evidence as Want to Read: Want to Read saving; Want to Read. The Qumran texts and other scrolls. Masoretic texts. Collations of the Masoretic materials. The sectarian authors commented on the books of Old Testament prophets and the book of Psalms and in the commentaries explained the biblical text as speaking about the history of the sect and of events that happened in the time of its existence. According to the manner of apocalyptic literature in the pesharim, persons and groups are not named with their proper names but are described by symbolic titles e.g., the Teacher of Righteousness for the founder of the sect. The most important sectarian commentaries are the pesharim on Habakkuk and on Nahum. The War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness. to Qumran writings in his index.7 raymond brown's commentary connected the Qumran writings to the background of John, although he emphasized that the contacts are not close enough to imply literary dependence.8 likewise, while rudolf Schnackenburg noted several significant similarities between John and Qumran, he did not think they were close enough to imply any sort of direct dependence. nonetheless Jewish parentage of the Johannine tradition despite its later development in a Greco-roman setting raises inescapable issues for consideration. In addition to exclamation marks, however, Johannine-Qumran dialogue also has its periods. Periods full Stops, and Starts, in the new testament-Qumran dialogue. Qumran is an archaeological site in the West Bank managed by Israel's Qumran National Park. It is located on a dry marl plateau about 1.5 km (1 mi) from the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea, near the Israeli settlement and kibbutz of Kalya. The Hellenistic period settlement was constructed during the reign of John Hyrcanus (134-104 BCE) or somewhat later, was occupied most of the time until 68 CE and was destroyed by the Romans possibly as late as 73. It is best known as the settlement nearest to...