

## Oral Tradition and the Dead Sea Scrolls

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The Dead Sea Scrolls are a cache of ancient manuscripts written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek discovered in eleven caves from 1947-1956. Most scholars associate the Dead Sea Scrolls with an ancient Jewish community who lived in a complex of ruins on the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea known as Khirbet Qumran. Early on scholars identified this “Qumran Community” with the Essenes, a well-known Jewish group discussed by Philo, Josephus, and Pliny the Elder. As pointed out by Géza Vermes, the significance of the Dead Sea Scrolls is due to their great antiquity compared with our previously oldest copies of biblical books: “Before 1947, the oldest Hebrew text of the whole of Isaiah was the Ben Asher codex from Cairo dated to 895 CE, as against the complete Isaiah scroll from Cave 1, which is about a millennium older” (2004:15). Overall, as summarized by Vermes, the Dead Sea Scrolls have substantially altered our views concerning both the text and the canon of the Bible, as well as ancient Jewish scribal practices (15-16).

For a number of reasons beyond the purview of this article, scholarship over the last fifty years has made it difficult to succinctly describe the ancient Jewish communities associated with the so-called “sectarian” compositions in the Dead Sea Scrolls.<sup>1</sup> Robust challenges to the Essene hypothesis and, more recently, the “Qumran Community,” make it increasingly difficult to speak of a single Jewish community.<sup>2</sup> Instead, compositions containing rules regulating daily life picture a dynamic movement consisting of multiple communities at both Khirbet Qumran and outlying settlements with divergent practices, membership, and leadership. Moreover, differences between Rule Texts (for example, the *Community Rule* and the *Damascus Document*) and between copies of the same Rule Text (for example, Cave 1 and Cave 4 copies of the *Community Rule*) bear witness to a historical development of laws and structures within these communities (Metso 2007:69-70).<sup>3</sup> With this in mind, throughout this article I use the ostensibly nebulous phrase “communities associated with the Scrolls” to describe the ancient Jewish groups reflected in “sectarian” texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls.

More importantly for the topic of this article, many of the most prominent methodologies within past scholarship have approached the Dead Sea Scrolls as writings frozen in print media.

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<sup>1</sup> The term “sectarian” is a heuristic category for certain texts that scholars believe belonged to the community that lived at Qumran. For a discussion of this term, see Newsom 1990.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Collins’ (2010:66-67; 2006) criticism of the term “Qumran Community.”

<sup>3</sup> Concerning the composite nature of the *Community Rule* and the *Damascus Document*, see Metso 1999.

In my opinion, this past emphasis on fixed (written) “texts” is unsurprising because, in addition to a paucity of sophisticated dialogue about the *textuality of scrolls*, a great deal of effort during the initial phases of Dead Sea Scroll scholarship needed to be spent on establishing the *texts of the Scrolls*. Countless hours were devoted to reconstructing written texts and producing critical editions of these texts. Printed texts themselves became the prime objects of some scholarly inquiry, the *sine qua non* of all subsequent scholarship. So, for some scholars, discussions about their content naturally entailed literary criticism of printed works. In addition, many past studies have tended to emphasize the literary and exegetical dimensions of the Dead Sea Scrolls, almost to the exclusion of questions concerning oral context.<sup>4</sup> As a result, a host of topics related to orality have not received sufficient consideration to date, including oral authority, oral performance, oral tradition, reading practices, and the impact of written texts as a form of oral discourse (i. e., performance criticism).<sup>5</sup> Moreover, a rigorous description of the role of memory and orality in scribal practices reflected in the Dead Sea Scrolls remains, for the most part, a scholarly desideratum.<sup>6</sup>

Simply put, this article focuses on one of these overlooked topics related to orality—namely, oral tradition. More specifically, I borrow John Miles Foley’s fourfold media taxonomy to examine oral tradition in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Although Foley’s taxonomy pertains to the world’s oral poetry, his categories nevertheless provide a useful heuristic model for those interested in the Scrolls. To my mind, Foley’s media taxonomy—the way it encourages us to reimagine oral poetry—offers a sort of magnifying glass through which we can better view oral tradition and oral traditional texts in the Dead Sea Scrolls. In particular, as I will detail below, Foley’s media taxonomy helps clarify two bodies of ancient Jewish oral tradition evidenced by the Dead Sea Scrolls, called (1) “mysteries” and (2) “hidden” and “revealed” laws.

### Oral Traditional Texts

“Oral traditional” texts are texts that “either stem directly from or have roots in oral tradition” (Foley 1991:xi).<sup>7</sup> Two aspects of this definition merit further explanation. First, by the word “text” I do not intend to convey simply written texts. Whether spoken or written, a text is a unit of speech that is designed to be stored and transmitted (Ehlich 1983:24-27). This linguistic concept of textuality breaks the link between writing and text, and it allows us to imagine oral-written texts (and oral texts). Second, the term “tradition” denotes a multivalent body of established thought, meaning, or interpretation (Foley 1995:xii; Rodríguez 2014:30, 52). When

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of this shortcoming within biblical studies, see Horsley 2013:vii-xviii and Niditch 2010.

<sup>5</sup> There are, of course, many exceptions to this general tendency in past Scrolls scholarship. Almost twenty years ago, for example, Metso proposed an oral setting for some legal regulations (1998:314).

<sup>6</sup> Notable exceptions include the work of Teeter (2014) and Carr (2011:13-36; 2015), who both incorporate orality and memory into their views of scribal practices.

<sup>7</sup> Concerning “oral traditional texts,” see Foley 2002:38-53.

this tradition is composed, performed, or received orally (in part or in whole), we call this “oral tradition.”

Foley’s (2002:39) media taxonomy divides oral poetry into four categories that are distinguished from one another based upon composition, performance, and reception:<sup>8</sup>

<u>Type</u>	<u>Composition</u>	<u>Performance</u>	<u>Reception</u>
1. Written Oral Poems	Written	Written	Written
2. Voiced Texts	Written	Oral	Aural
3. Voices from the Past	Oral/Written	Oral/Written	Aural/Written
4. Oral Performance	Oral	Oral	Aural

As Foley cautions, however, these categories can “combine and interact in interesting ways” (2002:40). In other words, Foley did not intend to construct a rigid barrier between these categories or imagine any “facile uniformity” within them (38). Foley’s goal was to create a model of oral poetry that “realistically portrays both its unity and diversity,” but which is still “flexible enough to accommodate the natural diversity of human expression” (38-39). Thus, the borders between these categories sometimes blur. For example, as Foley notes, some oral traditional texts “straddle” two categories or exist on the “cusp” of two categories (44-45). With this in mind, my discussion of oral traditional texts in the Dead Sea Scrolls will not treat Foley’s media taxonomy as “four categorically distinct phenomena” (Rodríguez 2014:83).

### Written Oral Poems

The first type of oral traditional text (“Written Oral Poems”) is composed, experienced, and transmitted in writing—that is, such texts are intended to be experienced by an audience as literary works (Foley 2002:50-52). In the words of Rafael Rodríguez, these works are intended for readers not “familiar with either the enabling event of performance or the enabling referent of tradition” (2014:85). Such texts, as he notes, are comparable to modern, academic transcriptions of oral poetry, which are stylized to be silently read by an individual who is divorced from the author (85). Although the reader usually does not speak “Written Oral Poems,” these oral traditional texts are “oral” because they inscribe linguistic features of orality, carefully “imitating” the oral like theatrical mime, suggesting speech without actually speaking words.

Reading practices in ancient Judaism practically eliminate this category from the Dead Sea Scrolls. In the majority of instances, the Scrolls were probably read out loud before an audience (for more on reading practices, see my discussion of the “Ruling” below). In limited (educational) contexts, as André Lemaire (2006:66) has argued, members may have privately studied or silently read some scrolls. That being said, the Dead Sea Scrolls were certainly not designed for silent reading *only*. In addition, this category is a poor fit for the Dead Sea Scrolls

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<sup>8</sup> I have rearranged the order of Foley’s categories for the sake of my own argument. I take this liberty because, as Foley states (2002:40), there is no hierarchy among the four categories or natural ordering among them.

because, as any neophyte will quickly realize, the Scrolls were written for readers familiar with the performance arena of the text.<sup>9</sup> This is precisely why so many aspects of textual interpretation remain obscure today.

### **Voiced Texts**

The second type of oral traditional text (“Voiced Texts”) is composed in writing but intended for both oral delivery and aural reception (Foley 2002:43-45). By way of analogy, we could think of this type oral traditional text as a “script” because such texts are designed for and lead to oral performance, whether through memorization, reading, or dramatic reenactment (Rodríguez 2014:84). “Voiced Texts,” according to Foley, “aim solely at performance and are by definition incomplete without that performance” (2002:43). In light of how little we know about the sociolinguistic setting of the vast majority of compositions in the Scrolls, the relevance of this category is difficult to assess. Nevertheless, several scrolls appear to straddle the categories of “Voices from the Past” (see below) and “Voiced Texts.”

Although it is unlikely that any of the Dead Sea Scrolls were written solely for performance, (1) the oral-written textuality of certain scrolls and (2) the oral-written register of certain scribal practices indicate that some were designed with oral performance in mind. The spatialization provided by stichography and other spacing techniques, as I have extensively argued elsewhere, intentionally represents how a text should be performed, presenting a “visible song” of oral performance (S. Miller 2015).<sup>10</sup> In addition, a variety of other scribal practices reflected in the Scrolls were designed to facilitate oral performance. Some special layouts, scribal markings, cryptic scripts, and divine codenames, for example, graphically represent specific ways of reading texts (S. Miller 2017b). Overall, as David Carr (2005:4-8, 160-62, 230) has argued, scrolls functioned as reference points for reading, studying, and memorizing.<sup>11</sup> In this sense, some of the Dead Sea Scrolls can be rightly understood as existing on the cusp between “Voiced Texts” and “Voices from the Past.”

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<sup>9</sup> Concerning the term “performance arena,” see S. Miller 2017a:280-81. In other words, the Scrolls were written for people who were immersed in (1) the oral traditions of the communities associated with the Scrolls and in (2) what Norton (2011:52-53) calls the “sense contours” of texts, the exegetical ideas traditionally associated with specific passages of texts.

<sup>10</sup> See also Person’s (1998:601-9) discussion of scribal performance. The phrase “visible song” refers to the pioneering work of O’Brien O’Keefe (1990:1-22), who argued that graphical reading cues (for example, hierarchy of script, capitals, lineation, spacing, and punctuation) in the manuscripts of Old English poetic works expose the oral literacy of scribes. Just as a musical piece may be scored for ease of performance, these cues present a “visible song,” a convenient reference point for recitation.

<sup>11</sup> See also Horsley 2007:101-4.

### Voices from the Past

The third type of oral traditional text (“Voices from the Past”) can be either orally or textually composed (Foley 2002:45-50). Although we can only read these works in a textual medium, they were performed and memorized at some point in the distant past.<sup>12</sup> As noted by Rodríguez, this is the most flexible of all of Foley’s categories because such texts “may also have been accessed through oral performance, public reading, or private reading (or all three). Consequentially, they may have been received aurally or as written texts” (2014:84). In many cases, “Voices from the Past” could also be accurately labeled “remnants from the past,” because only written records remain. And written records only preserve traces of the traditions that constituted such oral traditional texts.

In my opinion, the majority of oral traditional texts evidenced by the Dead Sea Scrolls, particularly those evidenced by the so-called “sectarian” compositions, fit best into this category. Given the pervasiveness of both oral communication and written media in the Greco-Roman world, as well as the widespread interplay between them in ancient Judaism, the vast majority of the Dead Sea Scrolls were probably experienced as both oral and written media.<sup>13</sup> In addition, a significant proportion of the Yahad—like the majority of Jews in Roman Palestine—was probably illiterate and experienced texts aurally.<sup>14</sup> Consequentially, we must imagine that the communities associated with the Scrolls, like most Jews in antiquity, probably experienced the Scrolls by hearing them read aloud or recited from memory.<sup>15</sup> Similar to how we experience audio books today, ancient Jews “read” the written text aurally through the oral performance of the reader.<sup>16</sup> Overall, the reading practices of the communities associated with the Scrolls indicate that many scrolls were likely received as both written texts and oral texts.

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<sup>12</sup> On account of this fact, “performance criticism” can be a valuable tool for understanding the social context of “Voices from the Past.” That being said, I am interested here in describing the different types of oral traditional texts witnessed by the Dead Sea Scrolls rather than a performance criticism of these texts. For examples of performance criticism, see M. Miller 2015:221-66; S. Miller 2018:368-81.

<sup>13</sup> Concerning the widespread degree of textuality, as well as the spectrum of literacy in Christianity and Judaism in Roman Palestine, see Keith 2011:85-110.

<sup>14</sup> The term “Yahad” is the self-designation of the communities associated with the Scrolls (Charlesworth 2000:134). As studies on literacy rates in Roman Palestine have estimated, probably less than ten percent of the total population could read (Harris 1989:272; Hezser 2001:34-36). Concerning literacy in the communities associated with the Scrolls, see Hempel 2017. As Hempel has correctly argued, “a significant proportion of the membership” in “the ‘textual community’ responsible for the literary riches unearthed at and near Qumran” were probably “illiterate or semi-literate” (81-82).

<sup>15</sup> In the words of Person and Keith, “Even within those ancient societies in which reading and writing (two separate skills) existed, written texts must be understood in relationship to the orality of the masses” (2017:2). Concerning reading practices in ancient Roman culture, see Johnson 2010:22. Concerning reading practices in the ancient Jewish communities associated with the Scrolls, see Popović 2017. As Popović’s study emphasizes, although reading alone or reading silently may have occurred in some cases, the social setting of the Scrolls primarily points towards reading aloud in “deeply social contexts” (448).

<sup>16</sup> Except, of course, their performance was live (not recorded). This fact is of crucial importance, because it inevitably leads to “multiformity.” No two performances of a single text are exactly alike, even if the text itself has not changed. With a voice recording, however, the performance—like printed media—remains frozen and infinitely repeatable. Concerning this difference between live and recorded performance, see Foley 2012:18.

## The “Ruling”

In order to illustrate the crucial role of oral tradition in the communities associated with the Scrolls, as well as the interplay between orality and texts in their reading practices, below I discuss one example of an oral-written text evidenced by the Scrolls. The “Ruling” (משפט) is a technical term mentioned in the *Community Rule*, a composition outlining statutes governing community life in addition to other topics. According to the description of nightly study sessions in the *Community Rule* (1QS 6:7b-8a), three components figured prominently in the proceedings of this particular general membership meeting: reading, interpreting, and blessing (1QS 6:7b-8a):

But the general membership will be diligent together (והרבים ישקודו ביחד) for the first third of every night of the year, reading aloud from the Book (לקרוא בספר), interpreting the Ruling (ולדרוש משפט), and blessing together (ולברך ביחד).<sup>17</sup> (1QS 6:7b-8a)

First, members “read” the Book. The “Book” (ספר), as Lawrence Schiffman and others have argued, most likely designates the Law and other authoritative texts.<sup>18</sup> “Reading,” however, is more difficult to define. In Judaism in antiquity, written texts were intrinsically connected with speech because, in the majority of circumstances, reading was speaking. According to Shemaryahu Talmon’s fitting characterization, “In the milieu which engulfed all varieties of Judaism at the turn of the era, a text was by definition an aural text, a *spoken* writing, a performed story” (1991:150; emphasis original). The verb “read” (קרא) therefore probably denotes oral performance, either reading aloud or recitation from memory, rather than silent reading.<sup>19</sup> Overall, the Law and other written texts were actively engaged through oral performance during the nightly study session.

Second, members “interpret” the Ruling. Past scholarship has primarily understood the “Ruling” as either “community regulations” or “Scripture,” and the verb “interpret” as “studying” or “expounding” texts.<sup>20</sup> But this studying should not be thought of as silent, private contemplation. As correctly emphasized by Martin Jaffee, “given the context of rules for collective gatherings in which this passage appears, it seems clear that this interpretive

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<sup>17</sup> All transcriptions of the *Community Rule* and the *Damascus Document* are from Parry and Tov 2004. The translations are mine.

<sup>18</sup> Most likely, the “Book” designates (1) the Law and (2) other authoritative texts such as “the Book of Hagi (Hagu)” and *Jubilees* (Schiffman 2010:140-41). For the viewpoint of the “Book” as Law, see Leaney 1966:185.

<sup>19</sup> As Brooke argues, “reading” in this passage “seems to be more than recitation from text or memory; it seems to involve comprehension and even some kind of active engagement with the text as it was performed” (2015:145).

<sup>20</sup> For the view that the “Ruling” represents community laws, see Schiffman 1975:42-45. For the view that the “Ruling” designates Scripture rather than community laws, see Hempel 2003:66 n.32 and Knibb 1987:117. But note Metso’s (2007:66) counterargument. Concerning the definition of the verb “interpret,” see Schiffman 1983:14-16 and Brooke 2013:111-13.

explication is an act of instruction rather than a private activity of the expounder” (2001:33).<sup>21</sup> Moreover, because “reading the Book” is preliminary, “interpreting the Ruling” appears to stem from exegesis of the Torah and other texts.<sup>22</sup> “Reading the Book” and “interpreting the Ruling,” in the words of Steven Fraade, were independent activities with two types of learning, Torah and sectarian rules, but they were also intrinsically connected: “the latter derive by inspired exegesis from the former” (1993:57).

For now, I wish to underscore two important consequences of the aforementioned interpretation. Because “interpreting” is coupled with “reading,” an intrinsically oral activity, exegesis during the nightly study sessions was both an oral and a textual activity.<sup>23</sup> More importantly, the oral-written nature of these reading practices suggests that the content of the “Ruling”—the “interpretation” of the “Ruling”—was not limited to written texts. Instead, the “Ruling” was most likely an oral-written text: written, because it contained sectarian regulations generated from exegesis of Torah and other authoritative texts; oral, because it contained traditional interpretation generated from the oral performance of Torah and other authoritative texts. I will return to this question further along.

Third, members “blessed together.” The portrayal of communal “blessings” bespeaks the liturgical nature of these study meetings and indicates that speech acts involving prayer were also an important component of each member’s oral performance. More broadly, however, the phrase “blessing together” denotes the recitation and interpretation of a wide range of thanksgivings and prayers (Brooke 2015:153). These “blessings,” according to George Brooke, performed two functions in this context: (1) interpretation of scriptural materials and (2) endorsement of the sectarian interpretation realized in the earlier “reading” and “interpreting” (153).

### The “Hidden” and “Revealed” Laws

Above I argued that the description of nightly study sessions (1QS 6:7b-8a) in the *Community Rule* portrays the “Ruling” as an oral-written text because it contained traditional interpretation transmitted by oral performance. In this section, I define the nature of this traditional interpretation and extend my argument towards Foley’s taxonomy of oral traditional texts. Although past scholarship has primarily understood the “Ruling” as either community regulations or Scripture, the “Ruling” is best understood as an oral traditional text containing

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<sup>21</sup> Similarly, according to Brooke, “To my mind there can be little doubt that the second term of the trilogy in 1QS VI, 7-8 [i. e., “interpret”] implies some kind of instruction in the form of exegetical activity and has such investigative activity as its referent” (2015:150).

<sup>22</sup> As Brooke concludes, “Thus if what is read forms the object of investigative deliberation and study, then predominantly the object of such study might well have been the Law in some form, or some other authoritative texts, such as the Psalms and the Prophets” (2015:150). He observes, however, that the object of study could also include “the legal decisions of the community’s council derived from the Law or other authoritative texts” (2015:150 n.39). See also Schiffman 1975:19-21, 75-76. I disagree with Schiffman, however, that exegesis was the only source of sectarian regulations.

<sup>23</sup> “At a minimum,” according to Fraade, “their combination in nightly communal study suggests some consideration of their interconnection” (1998:67). See also Brooke 2015:145 and Popović 2017:456-66.

both oral performance and textual exegesis. More precisely, the “Ruling” is a “Voice from the Past” constituted by a body of oral tradition conveying “hidden” and “revealed” laws.

According to the cultural memory of the Yaḥad, the generations of old abandoned God’s covenant (CD 3:2-11).<sup>24</sup> As a punishment, God hid himself from ancient Israel (הסתיר פניו מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל), and the correct interpretation of the Torah was subsequently concealed from Israel (וכול מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל דְּבַר הַנְּסֻתָּה).<sup>25</sup> But these bygone interpretations, although neglected, were not irreclaimable. Members of the Yaḥad could recover these formerly “hidden laws” through reading and interpreting authoritative texts—activities that primarily occurred during community meetings. Consequentially, all laws could be classified into one of two categories: “the revealed” (הנגלות) and “the hidden” (הנסתרות).

The “revealed” laws, according to Schiffman, “were known to all Israel, for they were manifest in Scripture, but the hidden laws were known only to the sect and were revealed solely through sectarian exegesis” (1994:247). Indeed, the earliest admission requirements in the *Community Rule* differentiate scriptural laws (revealed) from sectarian laws (hidden). Regulations proscribe associating with those who neither study “hidden” things (הנסתרות) nor follow “revealed” things (והנגלות). New members should keep separate from wicked outsiders who knowingly transgress revealed laws and refuse to discover hidden laws by studying God’s statutes (1QS 5:10-12).<sup>26</sup>

Before proceeding to an explanation of the Ruling as a “Voice from the Past,” I should stress two essential aspects of hidden and revealed laws. First, as Schiffman himself points out, the distinction between hidden and revealed is not entirely consistent because God *reveals* hidden laws (cf. CD 3:13-14).<sup>27</sup> According to the initiation oath (1QS 5:8-9), for example, members swear to follow the law “as understood and interpreted by the community”—that is, all

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<sup>24</sup> CD (=Cairo Damascus Document) designates two copies of the *Damascus Document* discovered in the *genizah* (storeroom) of a Cairo synagogue in 1896. Over fifty years later (in 1952), extensive fragments of eight more copies were found in Qumran Cave 4. The designations for these copies are 4QD<sup>a-h</sup> (4Q266-73).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. CD 1:3; 1QS 8:11. Cf. also CD 2:8.

<sup>26</sup> Concerning the doctrine of predestination within the communities associated with the Scrolls, see Schiffman 1994:145-57. According to the strictly deterministic view of the Yaḥad, transgressors could not discover the true meaning of hidden laws even if they sought to do so; nevertheless, insiders should not reveal hidden laws to outsiders. On the one hand, for those who are predestined to repent, members should not reveal the hidden laws until they have done so and joined the community. On the other hand, for those who are predestined to suffer God’s wrath, members should not reveal the hidden laws because they will never repent and join the community. In addition, according to the ethical dualism of the Yaḥad, outsiders are still culpable for disobeying laws that they have never discovered. Despite the fact that all humans are predestined by God to be a part of either the “sons of light” or the “sons of darkness,” all people are responsible for their own sin.

<sup>27</sup> In Schiffman’s words, “that which is *nistar*, hidden or secret, to the outside community may be described as *nigleh*, revealed, to the sect” (1975:24). According to CD 3:13-14, God “reveals hidden things to them” (לגלות להם). For other examples, see 1QH<sup>a</sup> 19:20 and 1QH<sup>a</sup> 26:15, where God reveals his hidden things to the speaker (וְגִלְיוֹת נִסְתָּרוֹת) or reveals hidden things (וְגִלְיוֹת נִסְתָּרוֹת), respectively.



the laws “revealed” to the priests and to the majority through Torah study.<sup>28</sup> In this instance, as noted by Jacob Licht (1965:131), the “revealed” laws are synonymous with the “hidden” laws derived from sectarian exegesis.<sup>29</sup> Overall, a large part of the Yahad’s identity revolved around a body of authoritative laws consisting of *both* “the revealed” (הנגלות) laws and “the hidden” (הנסתרות) laws that were “derived through inspired exegesis at the sectarian study sessions” (Schiffman 1983:213).

Second, these laws were revealed both orally and textually. On the one hand, hidden/revealed laws were received and transmitted via a written medium. According to Schiffman and others, the hidden laws were at some point “formulated in the sectarian codes” eventually finding “their way into the texts before us” (1983:213).<sup>30</sup> In other words, some hidden/revealed laws were the basis for regulations recorded in both the *Community Rule* and the *Damascus Document*. On the other hand, hidden/revealed laws were received and transmitted orally. Regulations surrounding admission, for example, portray “revealed” laws as oral exegesis of written texts. According to the *Damascus Document* (CD 15:10-14), members should not “tell” the initiate (ואל יודיעהו) about the Yahad’s laws before the Mebaqqer (“Overseer”) “examines him” (בדרשו אתו), “informs him” (יודיעהו), and “prescribes” (וצוה) a particular study curriculum addressing “everything that is revealed from the Law” (כל אשר נגלה מן התורה).<sup>31</sup> Unless we envision members passing written notes to prospective members or the Mebaqqer (“Overseer”) prescribing a written study guide, this description of the admission process suggests revealed laws are taught and transmitted orally.

Likewise, “hidden” laws are orally revealed. The verb “reveal” (גלה) often connotes speech that reveals to the ears and uncovers the eyes—that is, speech that is both heard (spoken) and seen (read). According to the opening paragraphs of the *Damascus Document*, for example,

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<sup>28</sup> More specifically, according to the *Community Rule* (1QS 5:7c-9a), each initiate swears to wholeheartedly return to the “law of Moses according to all that he commanded” (תורת משה ככול אשר צוה). But, as pointed out by Knibb (1987:109), this oath also obligates members to follow the law “as understood and interpreted by the community”—that is, all the laws “revealed” through Torah study (לכול הנגלה ממנה). In the *Community Rule*, these laws are revealed to “the majority of the men of their Covenant” (ולרוב אנשי ברייתם). In addition, compared with the Cave 4 copies (4QS<sup>b</sup> [4Q256] and 4QS<sup>d</sup> [4Q258]), the Cave 1 copy of the *Community Rule* stipulates that one must also follow the laws revealed to Zadokite priests (cf. 1QS 5:7c-9a). For a discussion of this “addition,” see Hempel 2003:74-76. According to admission requirements in the *Damascus Document* too (CD 15:13-14), the initiate swears to follow “everything that is revealed from the Law” (וכל אשר נגלה מן התורה). In the *Damascus Document*, however, these laws are revealed to the “multitude of the camp” (לרוב המהנה).

<sup>29</sup> For a detailed explanation, see Jassen 2007:335-37.

<sup>30</sup> For this view, see also Metso 2007:69-70 and Jassen 2008:307-37. According to Jassen, “The Qumran rule books represent the record of the legislative activity of these inspired individuals [i. e., leadership] during nightly study sessions” (308).

<sup>31</sup> The Mebaqqer (“Overseer”) commands a study curriculum addressing each initiate’s deficiency in “everything revealed from the Law to the multitude of the camp” (CD 15:13b-14). According to the various admission processes outlined in the *Community Rule* too, a prospective member’s knowledge of sectarian regulations is tested through oral interlocution not written examination. According to the later, more developed admission process, the head priest examines (יודרשהו) the initiate’s “understanding and works” (לשכלו ולמעשיו), and the general membership interrogates (ונשאלו) the initiate about particulars of “all the precepts of the Yahad” (כול) (משפטי היחד) (1QS 6:13c-16a). Although this passage does not explicitly designate sectarian laws as revealed/hidden laws, the relatively earlier description of admission indicates that these “precepts” include not only the laws in the Torah but also “all the revealed laws from it [the Torah]” (לכול הנגלה ממנה) (1QS 5:8-9).

God uncovered (ויגל) their eyes to understand hidden things (בנסתרות) and opened their ears to hear deep things (4QD<sup>c</sup> [4Q268] 1 7). The leader elsewhere declares: “listen to me, all who have entered the covenant, so I can reveal to your ears (ואגלה אזנכם) the ways of the wicked” (CD 2:2); “listen to me so that I may uncover your eyes to see (ואגלה עיניכם לראות) and to understand the deeds of God” (CD 2:14). As these examples suggest, revealing to the ears and uncovering the eyes also denotes mental comprehension, perceiving hidden knowledge with the eyes and ears of one’s mind.<sup>32</sup> But even in this symbolic connotation, a speaker reveals knowledge through verbal utterance and a hearer perceives understanding through audible speech. Intellectual discernment is tantamount to listening.<sup>33</sup>

This oral-written background of hidden/revealed laws sheds light on the meaning of “interpret the Ruling.” As Jaffee has already insightfully argued, the “Ruling” represents a “preserved record of the periodic disclosure of things ‘hidden’ from all Israel and ‘disclosed’ to the Yahad in their collective textual studies” (2001:36).<sup>34</sup> More precisely, to put a finer point on Jaffee’s interpretation, hidden/revealed things designate a body of oral-written tradition, whereas the Ruling is an oral traditional text stemming directly from this body of revealed/hidden tradition. Hidden/revealed things are written because some of these traditions eventually found their way into Rule Texts such as the *Community Rule*; they are oral because some were also revealed and transmitted orally during general membership meetings such as the nightly study session. Returning to Foley’s typology of oral traditional texts, we could therefore quite accurately label the Ruling as a “Voice from the Past,” as it was transmitted in both oral and textual media, but written records only preserved a trace of the larger body of tradition that constituted this oral traditional text. As perceptively suggested by Sarianna Metso, the purpose of the *Community Rule* “was not to serve as a law-book, but rather as a record of judicial decisions and an accurate report of oral traditions” (1998:314; emphasis added).

## Oral Performance

The last type of oral traditional text (“Oral Performance”) is composed, performed, and passed on by word of mouth in front of a listening audience (Foley 2002:40). As summarized by Rodríguez, “the written text plays no role whatsoever (unless a recording or transcription is made after the fact)” (2014:83). Moreover, according to Foley, “the processes of composition and performance are usually simultaneous,” and the reception is “customarily live and immediate” (Foley 2002:40). Foley and others capitalize “Oral Performance” to distinguish this

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<sup>32</sup> Other examples of *galah* (גלה) also exhibit this nuance. The speaker in the *Hodayot*, for example, asks, “h[o]w can I dis[cern] un[l]ess I see this [or understand these things unless you give me insight; and ho]w can I see unless you have opened (גליתיה) my eyes, or hear [unless...] (1QH<sup>a</sup> 21:4-6). Unless otherwise stated, all transcriptions and translations of the *Hodayot* are from Schuller and Newsom 2012. Similarly, “uncovering the ears” denotes hearing and understanding God’s revelation in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Isa 22:14; Job 33:16).

<sup>33</sup> For more on the oral nature of “mysteries” and “hidden/revealed” laws, see Mysteries, below.

<sup>34</sup> As correctly argued by Jaffee, “the session for the many seems to have been understood as a setting for occasional disclosures or revelations that were transmitted as part of the community’s fund of separatist knowledge” (2001:34). Cf. also Metso 2007:64.

type of oral traditional text from “oral performance,” the reading, recitation or enactment of a tradition (oral or written) before an audience (Rodríguez 2014:135 n.51).

Concerning the Dead Sea Scrolls, we simply don’t know enough about the sociolinguistic setting of the vast majority of these texts, so this type of oral traditional text is nearly impossible to evaluate with certainty. “The point is,” as Mladen Popović correctly asserts, “we do not know the historical reality, the lived reality, behind the manuscripts in relation to each other and in relation to their ancient handlers” (2017:453). Even more obvious, we possess not one spoken syllable, not one iota of one spoken syllable, of any composition from the Dead Sea Scrolls. Written texts are all that remains. Despite these difficulties, some oral traditional texts evidenced by the Dead Sea Scrolls appear to blur the line between “Voices from the Past” and “Oral Performance.”

In addition to revealed/hidden laws, the identity of the communities associated with the Dead Sea Scrolls centered on two dynamic bodies of tradition called the “mystery of existence” (רז נהיה) and the “wonderful mysteries” (רזי פלא).<sup>35</sup> Most broadly speaking, the “wonderful mysteries” pertain to God’s acts of judgment and redemption over both his creation and his elect, whereas the “mystery of existence” covers eschatology, history, and creation. We find mystery language primarily in sapiential literature such as *Instruction* (1Q26, 4Q415-418) and *Mysteries* (1Q27, 4Q299-300), a composition so-named by the editors of the *editio princeps* because of its repeated references to “mysteries” (רזים). In addition, mysteries are described in various other genres such as poetic and liturgical works, legal texts, and apocalyptic texts (Thomas 2009:127-50).

To my mind, both the “mystery of existence” and the “wonderful mysteries” should be considered examples, albeit non-paradigmatic, of “Oral Performance.” They are not quintessential “Oral Performance” because they were partly inscribed in written texts. And we cannot know for certain whether these written descriptions of both the “mystery of existence” and the “wonderful mysteries” were either (1) transcriptions of oral performance or (2) written texts that were orally performed (or some combination of both). That being said, four clues suggest that the written descriptions of both the “mystery of existence” and the “wonderful mysteries” are primarily a record after the fact, a report of oral performance. Therefore, despite being partly inscribed, the “mystery of existence” and “wonderful mysteries” represent a type of oral traditional text that is much closer to “Oral Performance” than “Voices from the Past.”

First, as John Kampen (2011:49) notes, both the “mystery of existence” and the “wonderful mysteries” were probably not viewed as written texts by the communities associated with the Scrolls because their content was far too broad for any single written text. “It seems doubtful,” according to Kampen, “that the authors of any of these texts believed that the entire mystery was contained within any one [written] text” (2011:49). Indeed, mystery language in the Scrolls—like oral tradition—elicits an “untextualizable network of traditional semantic associations” (Foley 1995:54). Second, as Kampen (2011:49) also points out, these mysteries are not directly connected with any specific literary text and attempts to do so have failed. In Kampen’s words, written “texts only provided hints and clues, leaving the reader and/or adherent

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<sup>35</sup> Because it is nuanced by various genres, compositions, and constructions, mystery language covers a host of connotations in the Dead Sea Scrolls. For a complete survey of “mysteries,” see Thomas 2009:127-86.

free to delve further into the revelation of the mystery” (50). Third, the descriptions of “mysteries” in written texts clearly imply that both the “mystery of existence” and the “wonderful mysteries” were performed in front of a listening audience and passed on by word of mouth (see below). Last, and most important, neither the “mystery of existence” nor the “wonderful mysteries” are ever described (either explicitly or implicitly) as written texts. They are never designated as (or compared with) nouns for written texts, such as “scroll” (מגילה), “book” (ספר), “rule” (סרך), or “text” (כתב).<sup>36</sup> And they are never “read” (קרא) or “written” (כתב). Instead, they are often described as being “revealed to one’s ear.”<sup>37</sup> Overall, as I explain below, it appears that the “mystery of existence” and “wonderful mysteries” were *principally* revealed through oral pedagogy and oral performance apart from written texts.

## Mysteries

Two threads running through mysteries’ various constructions and connotations weave pedagogy and performance into the tapestry of mystery language. According to the first trope, mysteries describe *experiential* knowledge. Mysteries convey a performative quality or, as Thomas suggests, perhaps even verb-like characteristics of action and process: “whenever ‘mystery’ shows up in the Scrolls it must *do* something, or someone must do something with it” (2009:128). More specifically, verbal associations often portray mysteries as a body of knowledge that is learned (4Q417 1 i 24-25; 4Q418 177 7a), studied (4Q416 2 iii 9, 14-15; 4Q417 1 i 6-7), and taught (1QS 9:16-20).<sup>38</sup> According to the *Community Rule*, for example, the Maskil (“Instructor”) should teach God’s wonderful mysteries to the sect’s members but conceal them from the sect’s opponents (1QS 9:18-20).

According to the second trope, mysteries designate *revelatory* knowledge. Mysteries denote special, esoteric knowledge that is acquired through both inspired revelation and inspired interpretation (Goff 2013:14-16; Thomas 2009:196-97).<sup>39</sup> According to the *Hodayot*, for example, God makes all his children wise in the way of mysteries (1QH<sup>a</sup> 19:13). Elsewhere in the *Hodayot*, the speaker praises God because “[you have given me insight] into [wonderful] myster[ies]” and “your [hid]den things you have revealed to me” (1QH<sup>a</sup> 19:19-20 of *Hodayah*

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<sup>36</sup> Concerning the use of these words for written texts, see Schiffman 2010:137-43.

<sup>37</sup> As I will demonstrate below, both “mystery of existence” and the “wonderful mysteries” have many other verbal associations. For a detailed list of the verbs used with these mysteries, see Thomas 2009:184-86.

<sup>38</sup> For passages that portray mysteries as knowledge that is comprehended or learned through instruction, see 1Q27 1 i 3; 4Q415 6 4; 4Q416 2 i 5; 4Q417 1 i 2-6; 4Q417 1 i 12-13; 4Q417 1 i 24-25; 4Q418 43-45 i 4; 4Q418 77 4; 4Q418 177 7; 4Q405 3 ii; 4Q511 2 ii 6; 1QH<sup>a</sup> 10:13, 15:27, 17:23, 19:10, 20:20; 1QM 16:16; 1QS 9:18, 11:3, 11:19.

<sup>39</sup> For examples of mysteries portrayed as supernatural revelation, see 1QS 4:18; 1QH<sup>a</sup> 12:28, 17:23, 19:19; 1QpHab 7:4-5; 4Q300 1a ii-b 2; 4Q417 1 i 8-9. For examples of mysteries being “revealed,” see 1QH<sup>a</sup> 9:21; 1Q26 1 4; 4Q270 (4QD<sup>c</sup>) 2 ii 13; 4Q416 2 iii 18; 4Q418 123 ii 4.

19:6-20:6).<sup>40</sup> Likewise, according to a hymn of the Maskil in the *Hodayot*, the Maskil (“Instructor”) blesses God for his divine instruction in wonderful mysteries; God literally “makes [them] known to me” (הודעתני) (1QH<sup>a</sup> 5:19-20 of *Hodayah* 5:12-6:33; cf. also 1QH<sup>a</sup> 15:30). As a result of this divine instruction, the speaker at one point declares that God has made him an “expert interpreter of wonderful mysteries” (ומליץ דעת ברזי פלא) (1QH<sup>a</sup> 10:15).

The question remains, however, *how* are both the “mystery of existence” and the “wonderful mysteries” revealed through divinely inspired instruction: by studying written texts, by listening to oral performance, or by some combination of both? The “mystery of existence,” which is primarily discussed in *Instruction*, covers a wide spectrum of esoteric knowledge including eschatology, history, creation, and ethics (Goff 2013:14-17; Kampen 2011:46-50). By means of the “mystery of existence,” God creates, maintains, and governs the cosmos (4Q417 1 i 8-9).<sup>41</sup> But throughout all these connotations, as Matthew Goff observes in his commentary on *Instruction*, the mystery of existence “signifies something that should be studied” and is normally “accompanied by an imperative that encourages contemplation” (Goff 2013:14; see, for example, 4Q417 1 i 6-7).<sup>42</sup> Even more importantly, as pointed out by Kampen, the verb “to uncover” or “to reveal” (גלה) is found six times in the phrase “revealed to your ear(s) the mystery of existence” (גלה אוזנכה ברז נהיה) (Kampen 2011:206).<sup>43</sup> On account of this, according to Kampen, the “mystery of existence” was most likely an “unwritten body of knowledge” that relies “on a continuing oral tradition passed on by teachers” (59).<sup>44</sup> At the very least, this verbal association indicates that the mystery of existence was something that was studied and revealed in an oral context.

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. also 1QH<sup>a</sup> 26:14-15 of *Hodayah* 25:34-27:3, a hymn of the Maskil (“Instructor”), where the liturgical master leads public worship by blessing God for “sealing up mysteries and revealing hidden things.” According to this trope, mysteries are analogous to “hidden/revealed” laws (see above). As a result, mysteries are sometimes equated with both the community’s regulations (1QH<sup>a</sup> 20:23) and the community’s council (1QH<sup>a</sup> 12:29, 19:12-13, 20:15-16).

<sup>41</sup> The “mystery of existence” pertains to the entire chronological order, the whole course of history from beginning to end. It covers the natural order of things, the workings of good and evil, and the divine role in the past, present, and future (Goff 2013:16; Kampen 2011:47; Thomas 2009:153-56).

<sup>42</sup> According to Goff, the “mystery of existence” is presented as “knowledge that can be ascertained through the study of supernatural knowledge” (2013:15).

<sup>43</sup> Cf. 1Q26 1 4; 4Q416 2 iii 18//4Q418 10a+10b 1; 4Q418 123 ii 4; 4Q418 184 2; 4Q418 190 2; 4Q423 5 1. According to 4Q416 2 iii 18, for example, God has “uncovered your ear to the mystery of existence (גלה אוזנכה ברז נהיה).” Some minor variation exists among these occurrences, however. According to 4Q418 123 ii 4, “God uncovered the ear of those who understand through the mystery of existence” (גלה אל אוזן מבינים ברז נהיה) (4Q418 123 ii 4). In 4Q418 190 2, the noun “ear” is plural: “uncover your [ea]rs to the mystery of [existence].” The above translations of *Instruction* are from Kampen 2011:73, 146, 161. Last, as Kampen also argues, the reference to “he uncovered our ear” in 4Q299 8 6 probably evokes this same notion (206).

<sup>44</sup> Kampen’s full quote is worth repeating: “Since the center of this group’s [i. e., the addressees of *Instruction*] existence is around an unwritten body of knowledge known as the ‘mystery of existence,’ elements of which are explained within *Instruction* but which rely on a continuing oral tradition passed on by “teachers” within the group, this is not public knowledge available to anyone. It is rather an exclusive body of knowledge available only to those who make the commitment to join this group, the first step in appropriating the knowledge of the mystery of existence” (2011:59).

Similarly, according to the authors of the *Hodayot*, “wonderful mysteries” cover a wide spectrum of esoteric knowledge. They pertain to God’s acts of judgment and redemption over both his creation and his elect (Thomas 2009:136-44). “Wonderful mysteries” often describe God’s providential care over nature, or the salvation and deliverance of God’s elect community both in the present age and in the age to come (Thomas 2009:141-44). More importantly, like the “mystery of existence,” “wonderful mysteries” are also revealed (גלה) to one’s ears and spoken with a voice. In the *Hodayot*, for example, the speaker understands God’s wonderful mysteries because God has revealed them to his/her ears: “These things I know because of understanding that comes from you, for you have opened my ears to wonderful mysteries” (כיא גליתה ארזני לרזי) (פלא) (1QH<sup>a</sup> 9:23).<sup>45</sup> Shortly after, still speaking about these mysteries, the speaker declares that anything he could “say” (אדבר) or “make heard” (ואשמיעה) has already been made known by God.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, the speaker “recites” (ואספרה) God’s wonders and commands his audience to “hear” (שמעו), so that they may properly understand his divinely inspired knowledge (1QH<sup>a</sup> 9:35-36). In sum, the speaker describes himself as someone who has audibly disclosed the knowledge that God has revealed in his ears. Like the “mystery of existence,” the “wonderful mysteries” are both spoken and heard, orally taught and aurally revealed.<sup>47</sup>

## Conclusion

In this article, I use Foley’s fourfold taxonomy of oral traditional texts to discuss two bodies of authoritative oral tradition evidenced by the Scrolls: 1) revealed/hidden things and 2) mysteries. More importantly, I suggest that the sectarian communities associated with the Dead Sea Scrolls witnessed the development of certain “oral traditional texts” derived from these bodies of oral tradition. The first body of oral tradition, called “hidden” and “revealed” things, consists of sectarian regulations and authoritative interpretation that God “reveals” through revelation and exegesis. These revealed and hidden laws constitute the “Ruling,” an oral traditional text generated from oral performance and textual exegesis during community meetings. More specifically, the “Ruling” is a “Voice from the Past,” as it was transmitted both orally and textually, but written records only preserved traces of its body of hidden/revealed tradition.

The second complex of oral tradition, described by various constructions with “mysteries,” contains a vast body of exclusive and esoteric knowledge. These “mysteries” twice

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<sup>45</sup> Likewise, according to 1QH<sup>a</sup> 6:13, “yo[u yourself revealed] in our hearing [wonderful mysteries] (ואתה) [גליתה] ארזנו ל[רזי פלא]” Cf. also 1QH<sup>a</sup> 15:41, where the speaker declares that God has “opened my ear to reports of your wonders” (ולשמיעות פלאכה גליתה ארזני). In several other instances, the synonym פתח describes God opening the speaker’s ears (1QH<sup>a</sup> 14:7, 22:26, 22:31, 23:5, 25:12).

<sup>46</sup> 1QH<sup>a</sup> 9:25. According to this passage, the speaker exclaims, “what could I speak that is not already known [by God], or what could I cause to be heard that has not already been explained [by God]?” (1QH<sup>a</sup> 9:25).

<sup>47</sup> According to *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice*, God’s wonderful mysteries are described as a “sound of jubilation” (4Q401 14 ii 2-3). I can only speculate about the larger context because these lines are fragmentary. Perhaps, as Newsom (1985:139) and Newman (2008:49, 71) suggest, these mysteries constitute “hidden things” (4Q401 14 ii 7-8) that are taught by the angelic praise in God’s heavenly temple.

constitute specific oral traditional texts called the “mystery of existence” and “wonderful mysteries.” Moreover, two recurrent themes portray these oral traditional texts as (Foley’s category of) “Oral Performance.” According to the first trope, these mysteries describe a body of experiential knowledge that is transmitted through oral pedagogy. According to the second trope, these mysteries designate a body of revelatory knowledge derived from divinely inspired oral performance. In both cases, these mysteries were principally transmitted and received orally, “revealed” to one’s ears apart from written texts. For the communities associated with the Scrolls, these mysteries were not primarily contained in written texts, and their descriptions of “mysteries” were records after the fact, written reports of oral performance.

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