Assessing the Genre of the Maskil Thanksgiving-Prayer (1QH^a XX 7–XXI 39[?]): A Superscription-Oriented Approach

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Abstract

Determining the genre of sectarian compositions from the Dead Sea Scrolls is a task beset with many obstacles, the most formidable being the lack of defined and complete texts. Our already limited understanding of sectarian genre is obscured by damage to many manuscripts, impeding methods such as form, rhetorical, and literary criticism. This thesis proposes a strategy for maximizing our knowledge of sectarian genres by focusing on the generic data in superscriptions. Using the *Maskil Thanksgiving-Prayer* as a case study (1QHodayot^a 20:7–21:39[?]), this thesis applies insights gained from an analysis of the form and content of Hebrew Bible and Dead Sea Scrolls superscriptions to assess the generic data contained in its superscription (20:7–14a).

To investigate the genre of the *Maskil Thanksgiving-Prayer*, this study proposes a "multi-axial approach," in which the kinds of information included in a composition's superscription serve as diagnostics for evaluating its genre. In this approach, superscriptions are understood as, using terms from cognitive science, "metacognitive" instructions that guide the "structure-mapping" process in generic comparisons. In other words, superscriptions are the scribal reading directions that facilitate the proper recognition of genre within a particular reading community.

The application of the multi-axial approach to the *Maskil Thanksgiving-Prayer* results in its identification as an intercessory prayer from the repertoire of the Maskil, which may also instruct its audience to participate in the distinctive practices of sectarian prayer. Although this method is not a replacement for traditional forms of genre criticism, it provides a ground for investigating the genre of compositions that have a superscription but lack a complete text. Furthermore, when applied to intact works, the multi-axial approach can supplement the analysis of form, content, or stylistics, offering a more robust assessment.